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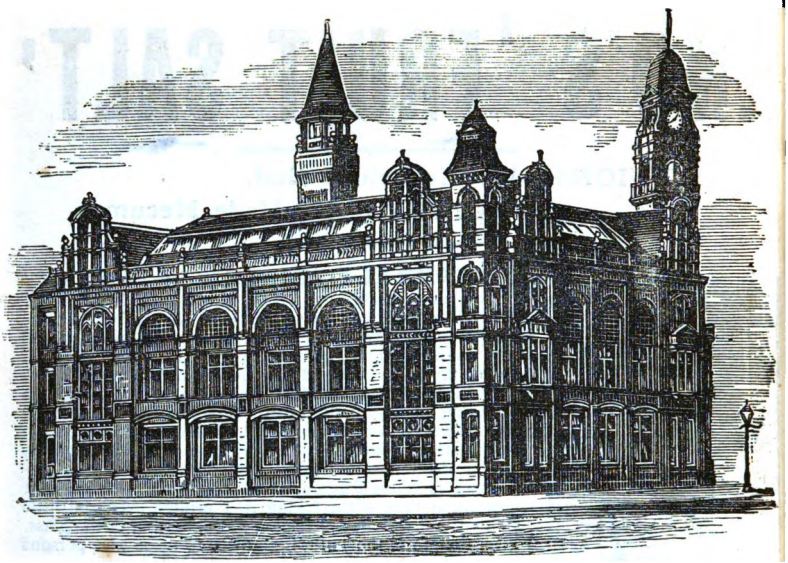

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EYRE'S ACQUITTAL

BY

HELEN MATHERS

AUTHOR OF 'STORY OF A SIN

LONDON
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'I had happier died by thee
Than live on as Lady Leigh.'

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EYRE'S ACQUITTAL.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

'But think na ye my heart was sair,
When I laid the mool on his yellow hair ;
O ! think na ye my heart was wae
When I turned about, away to gae ?'

THE remote village of Lovel was one afternoon electrified by news of the death of its Squire, and the intimation that his body might be expected to arrive before night, under the care of his friend, Lord Lovel.

In less than an hour, Mr. Eyre's grave was being dug beside that of the woman whose lover and husband he had been, and of whose murder he was secretly believed to be guilty ; though, if he had killed her, it had been for love—because, though he could endure to see her die, he could not brook the sight of himself degraded in her eyes, or, as others said, know himself supplanted in her love by his friend.

He had never been accused of the crime, nor even for some time suspected of it, and this was partly due to the fact that at his instigation a woman named Hester Clarke

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(formerly his mistress) had been tried for the murder, and, by circumstantial evidence, so nearly convicted, that her acquittal was indignantly declared by the judge to be a gross miscarriage of justice.

But some extraordinary disclosures made by Mr. Eyre in the course of the trial had, in the eyes of many of those present, reversed the position of accuser and accused: while the ruthless lifting by his own hand of the curtain that had screened his inner life appalled the gazers, who in one scathing flash of light saw him stripped naked of his worldly robes, and as the man that God and his own heart had long known him.

He stood before them a man who for years had been at the mercy of a secret sin, himself the fatal moving power out of which had sprung three successive tragedies of unspeakable pathos and horror, upon which he gazed impassive and unsubdued—less repentant of his misdeeds than callously bold in vaunting them—tearing in shreds the honourable life he had worn in those years when he had

'*Built God a church, and laughed His Word to scorn,*'

and by his inhumanity rather than his sins cutting himself off from all sympathy with his kind.

As betrayer and deserter of the woman Clarke in her youth, and remorseless bringer to justice of her only friend and servant for the murder of his unacknowledged child, though of such murder she was practically innocent, and privately exerting his great influence to hang her; as the man who first robbed his best friend of his sweetheart, then filched his good name and wore it before the world; as the assassin who attempted Hester Clarke's life because he lived in hourly dread lest she should tell Mrs. Eyre the truth; as the accuser of that

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unhappy woman of his wife's murder, and as a magistrate committing her to gaol while yet his child's corpse lay warm upon her knee—thus, bit by bit, his character during the trial painted itself to the terrified beholders' gaze, till all felt themselves in the presence of a man whose hand would not shrink from any deed to which his iron will impelled him.

From that day the secret conviction grew and strengthened that Mr. Eyre had himself been the murderer of the wife he had so passionately loved, the most popular reason assigned being a violent jealousy of his friend Lord Lovel, culminating in a fit of madness in which he slew her.

But those who were best acquainted with Mr. Eyre's haughty and inflexible character said that he never needed to know jealousy, and felt none; but that, the complications of his position with regard to Hester Clarke becoming unbearable, rather than see his wife endure those miseries that the knowledge of his sin must cost her, he had cut the knot of his difficulties and her life with a single blow, and so secured ignorance to her for ever.

Others denied the murder to have been one of either jealousy or pride, declaring it to be one of simple greed, committed for the sake of the magnificent diamonds Mrs. Eyre had worn that night, and which were found missing when she was discovered stabbed to the heart, but breathing yet, in her chair.

Strong suspicion had at the time attached itself to the gardener, who was seized on a ladder, placed against her window, within a few moments of the deed, and whose infatuation for Mr. Eyre's French nurse was said to be powerful enough to precipitate him into crime for her sake.

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'Give me diamonds like Madame's, and I will marry you,' she had said to him not half an hour before the murder; and the diamonds had disappeared, and the gardener been caught almost red-handed, yet Mr. Eyre had refused for one moment to believe in the man's guilt, all his energies being bent to the conviction of the woman Clarke; and before setting out on that lengthened journey, which extended to three years, he had the man and maid married in his presence, and left them established in sole charge of the Red Hall, with certain funds to be disposed of according to his directions. And, however keenly watched by the village, the oddly-matched pair had given rise to no suspicion, and gradually people ceased to believe in their guilt.

Of Mr. Eyre nothing was known. He and Lord Lovel had set out for abroad within a few days of each other, and were conjectured to be together; but as both preserved an unbroken silence, sending home neither word nor sign of their existence, the first positive news of them that reached the village was contained in the telegram that announced the speedy arrival of living and dead.

But those who gathered round to see the digging of Mr. Eyre's grave whispered that the real secret of Mrs. Eyre's death would never be known now, since the key to it was for ever locked within the cold heart of the man whom she alone had so passionately loved, while all other men and women feared him.

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CHAPTER II.

'Nae living man I'll love again,
Since that my lovely knight is slain;
Wi' ae lock o' his yellow hair,
I'll chain my heart for evermair.'

'SEEMS like yesterday I were digging *her* grave,' said the sexton, jerking his head towards the narrow green mound where Madcap Eyre lay with her child on her breast, 'and I'd sooner ha' dug his the first. . . . I misdoubt me if the daisies and crokuses 'll ever spring as free above his, as they do out o' her pretty head—God bless her!'

'If he'd bin a poor man he'd lie at the cross-roads with a stake through his heart,' said Nancy of the Mill, who stood with arms akimbo. 'Lord! to think that she died as happy, like a baby in its mother's arms—'tis said she felt so safe-like, she didn't even kiss him before she went . . . And he'll never get near enough for her to kiss him now—God A'mighty 'ud never stand it.'

'I niver thowt he'd a died till he'd swung somebody or 'nother for her,' said the blacksmith; 'to see his grave a-digging seems like a story broke off short-like in its middle—t'other world gets the end o't, and neither they nor us is a bit the wiser.'

'Love begins all things, and death ends 'em,' said the

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gravedigger sententiously; 'half the sin in the world's born of the taste o' a cherry lip, and a gentle eye'll sink many a soul as has kept the commandments from his youth up—'twas a most powerful true love as turned th' Squire from a honest man to a black-hearted sinner.'

'He give his sowl for her,' said a sad-faced woman who stood by, 'and he couldn't do more for her if 'twas ever so—he knew that if ever she comed to know about Hester Clarke and the drownded child, 'twould kill her . . . 'Tis said that just before she died she said 'twas the happiest moment of her life, and niver knowed she'd been murdered—she went so quick after she'd come out of the chloroform.'

'There's a man for you!' cried Nancy, lifting up her hands; 'if so be as he *did* stab her through jealousy, to bide beside her all through that night, holding the handkerchief to her mouth, and not letting her come to herself one blessed minnit, and the doctor saying, sez he, "If she dies, 'tis murder;" and the Squire looks up and sez, "What then?" O Lord, what a man!'

'It minds me of Otheller,' said a village pedagogue, whose rusty coat-tails swept his heels; 'he killed *his* wife for jealousy; but there was no knife or chloroform *there*, only pillows.'

'The master had no call to be jealous,' said Sally Genge, who had just joined the group; 'she never loved but him, and he knowed it.'

'Then what ailed her to go running away from him with the young lord?' said the old man acidly; 'didn't the whole county ring with it, and wasn't the Squire a changed man from that day?'

'A mother bird don't run away when she flies straight home to see her little uns has taken no harm while she's away,' cried Sally indignantly; 'she jest took an inner-

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cent morning ride, and the young lord overtook her, and we all come out to our doors to see 'em go by, he leading the ass so careful, and lookin' so sorrowful, as if he know'd the ride was beyond her strength, and she so pale and sweet, a-wishing of us all good-morrow . . . there never was two innercenter young souls, or two as loved each other so purely.'

'And what a pair they made,' said the gravedigger, resting on his spade; 'so lightsome, spirity, and beautiful! She'd walk beside master, but dance alongside of t'other—seems like as if they two ought to be lying here side by side . . . he left his heart wi' her the day we laid the mool above her.'

'She were well loved,' said the sexton's wife softly; 'and for her sake the two men loved one another. 'Twas grand to see 'em standing shoulder to shoulder at th' 'sizes—'twas the only speck o' vartue in master's character when he up an' said 'twas he, an' not the young lord, as had brought Hester Clarke to shame—seemin' as if he didn't vally the wurld's opinion a groat, so long as *she* never heard the whisper o't.'

'He was ever of a murderish sort of mind,' said the pedagogue, shaking his head, 'as was clearly shown when he shot at Hester and killed a rook. 'Twas greatly in my mind, when he set out so quick after Lord Lovel, that revenge was at the bottom; for, though a man may kill his wife for love, he mostly kills her lover for hate.'

'Very bookish talk!' said the sexton disparagingly; 'some more leavings of Otheller, I s'pose; but them as sits down to write books is mostly pore creatures, and nat'rally the folks they set struttin' on the page is like theirselves . . . they ain't true to human natur'; an' if you ticket a man wi' a deadly sin, an' expect him to act

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accordin', ten to one but he'll bust out with a bit o' vartue as'll make you feel as if you'd never knowed its right colour before . . . an' if the master slew her as he lov'd best of all upon earth, 'tis ten to one 'twas for some reason as never entered into your Otheller's or any of them dummies' heads.'

'Dummies!' ejaculated the pedagogue, furious at this insult to the creatures of his own discovery—*ergo* his own; but a push from one of the crowd, nearly precipitating him into the open grave, compelled him to take an awkward leap backwards, in the course of which his head met a tombstone, that made him think of Othello with disgust for a week.

The cause of the catastrophe was Job, who came to the very edge, and looked down with bitter hatred at the yawning chasm.

'Dig it deep,' he said; 'he's been the curse of the place this many a year, and there's no knowing where his sins may sprout up again; but please God we've done with bastards and murders now. A bad man!' cried Job, striking his foot against the crumbling earth; 'he spoilt my little Master Frank's life, and made him carry on his shoulders a sin that wasn't his'n; and he spoke up the truth too late, for *she* never knowed it . . . there's nought but hemlock'll grow here, though them two sweet souls laid alongside might save him . . . but, thank God, he's *dead*, and my little Master Frank's above ground!'

His old voice ceased in a triumphant quaver as he turned from the grave to the dwindling group of villagers, for the short November afternoon was closing in, and a chilly mist rising in spectral shapes about the nearer tombstones, and gathering more closely about the little group, formed a wall that shut out all objects beyond.

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'Ay!' said the sexton, looking down; 'but I'd rather to-day was to-morrer, and we'd got him *here*. Th' Squire were never warsted in anything yet, an' it seems s'prisin' that he should be throwed in his first wrastle so to speak, wi' death. . . I mostly gets a blink o' the dead face in its coffin whiles I'm diggin' its grave, but somehow I can't see the master's.'

'You shall within the hour,' said Job briskly; 'and now, I must be hastenin' back, or the body'll be there afore me; and my little Master Frank'll be expecting——'

What was it that froze the words on his lips? Whose was this tall shape that loomed gigantic through the mist, and from which, after one shuddering glance, all fell away, clutching at each other like drowning creatures in a sinking ship? Job, standing erect, the vigour of youth rekindled in his veins, withered and grew old, as, with a lightning conviction of the truth, he stammered, 'My master—where is my master?'

Mr. Eyre looked down at the half-veiled chasm at his feet.

'His grave is already dug,' he said, 'and you have received my message. He lies at the house yonder.'

'His grave?' repeated Job slowly and stupidly; '*his grave* . . . but he's alive—the message was from him . . . 'twas *your* body he was bringing . . . his dinner's preparing, and his chair's set. . . . My little Frank,' he sobbed, 'my dear, dear little Master Frank'—they seized Mr. Eyre's arm and shook him like a reed; 'did you kill him as you killed your wife?' he shrieked.

'He was killed in battle on October 25,' said Mr. Eyre, and his voice, hollow and worn, might have been a ghost's. 'He had been an hour dead when I found him. I laid him in his coffin and brought him straight

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home. The message must have blundered on its way.'

But Job did not hear . . . by the side of that empty grave his faithful old heart broke, and, palsied and tottering, he had crept away home to where, for the last time, his little Master Frank was waiting to receive him.

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CHAPTER III.

'Sune as he yielded up his breath
I bare his corpse away,
Wi' tears that trickled for his death
I washed his comelie clay;
And siker in a grave sae deep
I laid the dear-luv'd boy;
And now for ever I maun weep
My winsome Gilderoy.'

'And so you dug my grave with a will, my friend,' said Mr. Eyre, looking keenly at the gravedigger, 'and I've disappointed you; but it shan't be love's labour lost. Lord Lovel loved my wife, and she him, and there's room for me on the other side. She should sleep sound between two such friends. And they shall have no monument, and no stained glass yonder, but only the flowers they both loved, with the sun shining through them; and there'll be no briar to grow out of either breast, but only a rose; and when my work's done, I'll lay my years down beside them—just twice theirs—all told. And so you thought I killed my wife?' he added, turning abruptly to the terrified villagers, who began to smart under a more wholesome fear of him in the flesh than in the spirit.

'Nay, sir,' said the sexton's wife, curtseying; 'tis not for poor folks like we to judge our master; th' old

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man did but prate out what he's caught up from his betters.'

'Good God!' cried Mr. Eyre, like a man violently awakened from a dream, 'is it possible?' then stooped and plucked a daisy from her grave. 'Poor, poor Madcap!' he said, so low that none might hear him; 'and is that all my love hath brought thee?'

Then, shrouding himself in his black cloak, the mist swallowed him up from the frightened gazers' eyes, and he was gone.

''Tis well that Frank lies yonder, not I,' he said aloud, as he crossed the churchyard, 'since that's the popular idea. I'll live to disprove it, if only for *her* sake—as if the sweet soul could have loved her murderer! And though I've thought of most things, I never thought of *that*, though clearly some fool did—most likely Busby—and set the country farmyard in a cackle, because its chief goose had laid another egg. But *she* can't hear them, and she's happy; and Frank's found her by now; and he loves her too well to tell her the secret he wouldn't tell *me*. What was it?' he cried aloud, and standing still in the darkness. 'Three years I've lost in hunting for it, and meanwhile the woman's escaped me. But I'll find her yet.'

As he climbed the familiar hill to his home, he thought of how often those two bright young creatures, now sound in death below, had trod it beside him; and once he drew back, as though physically unable to face the empty house, across whose threshold his Madcap would never dance to meet him any more. He entered the courtyard, and mechanically turned to that wing of the house in which her chamber lay; and, from the force of habit, looked up as if he would have distinguished her window through the darkness. But what was this? A clear

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light burned within, and as he paused below, his foot struck against a ladder placed against the wall. 'Good God!' he thought; 'has it stood here ever since that night?' And then he remembered that this was the very day and month of the year upon which she had been murdered.

He had thought it unnatural that Hester should climb the ladder unless with sinister intent; yet he found his foot on the first rung before he was aware; and as he rose, step by step, put himself in her place, and in the lighted room above seemed to see Madcap, asleep and unconscious of her doom.

As his head and shoulders rose above the sill, filling the window from lintel to lintel, he saw that it was unshuttered and ajar, while through the clouded pane before him he once more beheld the diamonds that he had last seen on his wife's neck when he left her in the drawing-room below with Lord Lovel.

'I'd rather have the right to wear these openly, than own the finest farm in Canada,' said a woman whose petticoat of linsey-woolsey, drab stays, and coarse white bodice, contrasted as curiously with the jewels she wore, as did her personal beauty with the sordid plainness of the man who stood at some little distance from her, his features expressing a stupid admiration that struggled with an almost abject terror.

'You're just doited to deck yersel' wi' 'em,' he said sullenly. 'M'appen but they'll hang the two on us yet.'

'There's only we two in the house,' she said; 'the child's asleep, and every door locked, and master's body's at the Towers by now. There's none likely to come nigh us to-night. Sit down, you fool,' she added, as she turned herself this way and that before the mirror, 'unless you fear to soil the chairs. Did ever you see fireflies give out such a shine as yon?'

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'Sit me down—here?' he said, looking not at his soiled fustian, but at the middle of the room, his eyes fixed as if he saw there some fearsome sight; 'seems like as I see her now as I seed her that night sittin' in her white gownd, and the red blood gurglin' out'—as though involuntarily, his earth-stained hand lifted itself, and pointed to where his eyes dwelt. 'I were mad to let mysel' be dragged here this night; and that poor soul, innocent of all save peeping, and a'most hanged for our sin—I'd ha' confessed all, afore I saw her swinging. An' all for nought but to see you wi' a halter of diamonds round your weazle——'

'Tis handsomer than many a lady's,' said the woman; adding half aloud, 'Why should I go with the poor fool at all? In Paris I might wear 'em, and——'

'I see no murder there,' Mr. Eyre had once exclaimed, gazing at his gardener's features; but as Josephine's half-dropped words reached the man's ears and he strode forward, his master knew that his study had been superficial, and that beneath yon boorish exterior might lurk unsuspected possibilities of crime.

'So you'd like to give me the go-by,' said Digges, with a bitter curse, as he crushed the woman's white arm in his coarse hand; 'jest you try it,' and he breathed hard and thick. 'If so be as I've sold my sowl for you, I'll git my penny's worth; an' where I go, you'll foller. I allus knew you was a bad lot, but your first fancy man'll be the last; for I'll kill the pair o' ye, an' you'll git a taste o' that hell as your covetin' the diamonds pitched me into. I've half the mind to tear 'em off yer body this night, an' 'fess to the truth——'

The woman laughed as she put her free arm about his neck and kissed him; her beauty held him in bondage yet. In the lower ranks of life it is seldom that a man

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ill-uses his handsome mate so long as she is true to him; when she is faithless he usually kills her, and Josephine had not tempted her clown so far yet.

'Didn't I promise to love you if you could give me diamonds like Madame's?' she said, sickening at the contrast of their two faces in the glass; 'and I've worn them *once*. To-night we'll unpick them from their settings, and hide them for the last time.'

'We maun bide afore we makes a move,' said Digges, who had relapsed into his usual stolid self; 'm'appen the neebours 'll keep their eyes open yet awhile.'

'They've given over suspecting long ago,' said Josephine, who had during her three years' marriage lost every trace of the French idiom in speaking, and acquired the English. 'Folks that dress themselves in woollen *must* be virtuous; and poverty's a grand cloak under which to hide one's sins.'

She was flaunting backwards and forwards before the mirror now, and beyond her lay the pure, simple background of Madcap's chamber, arranged just as she had left it when she had ignorantly started on her last long journey, without farewell kiss or word to the husband and children she so passionately loved.

There stood her white bed, and beside it the table that held her Bible, Prayer-book, and portrait of her husband alone, and her two boys together; near them lay the broken toy that Dody had dropped when he had paid her his last visit, and wept at leaving her, not knowing how soon he would share with her that sleep which knows no waking. . . . Yonder, too, was the cabinet, of which one unlocked drawer held a secret that defied Mr. Eyre, while by its side the easy-chair stood, in which Madcap had been 'twinn'd of her sweet life' unknowing. . .

On the borders of the half-light Digges hovered, fearful

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to remain, as to depart, alone, his round eyes resting on anything rather than his wife. All at once the blackness of the window attracted Josephine's attention; it would make a longer looking-glass than the one in which she gazed, and she approached it, seeing but night beyond, for Mr. Eyre covered his face with his mantle as she advanced, so that she saw the jewels flashing like sun-rays upon an inky pool.

But as she looked, some horrible lightning impression of gazing at dark against dark seized her; involuntarily she pressed nearer, and as the heavy mantle slipped, and Mr. Eyre's eyes met hers through the glass, his features menacing and stern, pale and haggard as a man new risen from the tomb, icy terror congealed the very blood in her veins, and slew in her the power to cry out—to stir. Ignorant and superstitious, she never doubted that this was her dead master in his cereclothes, come to confront her with the witnesses to her crime upon her body . . . and reason tottered, but was not overthrown, till, dashing the casement wide, he stretched his arm and seized her . . . then her wits fled, and even as Mr. Eyre knew it, and saw the chamber-door open, and Digges gone, he knew that once more the secret of Madcap's death had escaped him.

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CHAPTER IV.

'Alas! who did medicine thee to that sweet sleep?'

Mr. Eyre cursed himself for a melodramatic fool as he let the woman go, and hastened to regain earth, knowing that there were but two exits from the Red Hall, by one or other of which Digges was certain to effect his escape.

But the pitch-darkness aided the fugitive, and Mr. Eyre felt so certain of his having got off that he wasted no time in searching the house, but descended to the village, where he had the curious misfortune to be mistaken at every other step for his own ghost.

The story of his appearance in the churchyard was not yet fully circulated through the place, and many believed his body to be then reposing at the Towers, so that some hindrance to the search for Digges was unavoidable.

'Save your cackles,' he said at last, sternly, 'and search for this man throughout every yard of the village —a hundred pounds to him who seizes and brings him to me alive; but let no one enter the Red Hall,' he added, as he mounted the horse that he had himself hastily saddled, and set out at full gallop for Marmiton.

Within five minutes the whole population of the village was abroad, some with lanterns, others with hastily made and kindled brands, whose light they flung on outhouses and startled fowl-cotes, beating each foot of field and

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wood, and even climbing to the steep cliff that rose sheer behind the Red Hall, in one upper window of which a light shone, tempting the seekers to pursue their search within.

But none dared withstand their master's commands—he had returned grimmer and more terrible than he departed; but surely not the guilty man they had supposed, as his search for Digges, and a few hasty words he had let fall, pointed to a discovery on his part that the gardener and his wife were the criminals.

'To be sure, a' said "Thank Gawd!' when she heard th' master wur dead,' said one of the seekers, gazing at the distant window; 'and her were a bit flighty an' dressy-like wonst—but, Lor', her sobered down an' got a modest, hard-workin' drab enow arter her married her mon.'

'An' he got as dour an' crabbed as if he'd wed pison by mistake,' said one of the women who had joined in the search. 'M'appen he killed the missus to get the dimonds for Josephine—an' Hester knowed it, but wouldn't speak cos she and t'other had been such fr'ens?'

'An' if so,' said another of the group, 'where's the dimonds? She'd never ha' kep' her itchin' fingers off 'em all these years; an' no talk o' goin' to furren parts neither, which folks mostly does wi' other folks' wallerbles.'

'God help the little un, all alone yon with Josephine, if so be as Digges and she's guilty!' said one of the women, shivering; 'but he never dropped a word o' her . . . an' no doubt he locked her safe in afore he comed away.'

But more than one mother looked back wistfully at the shrouded pile that all had been forbidden to approach; and when, half an hour later, Mr. Eyre rode through the

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village, accompanied by mounted constables, many were the seekers who volunteered to accompany them to the Hall, only to be peremptorily refused. Mr. Eyre's keen glance at once discerned that no trace of Digges had been found; and, without pausing to make inquiry, he and those with him rode on to the house, where an entrance was effected by breaking a window.

But for the gardener's fatal error in leaving the ladder against the wall, no one could possibly have surprised the woman that night; and those who followed Mr. Eyre uttered a cry of amazement as, pausing on the threshold of what had been his wife's chamber, he made a sign to them to look in.

Before the glass sat Josephine, laughing softly to herself, and playing with the diamonds that now in the idiot's kingdom were her own—to be worn without fear, and gloated over to her heart's content. For the first time in her life she was happy—ay, and to the last day of it, for Mr. Eyre never allowed them to be taken from her during that long and weary time, through which he waited patiently for the flicker of reason that should cast its light upon the manner of Madcap's end.

'The man's not guilty,' said one of the constables, who had been carefully watching her; 'if she'd only stolen the diamonds, the shock of seeing you wouldn't have driven her mad. Most likely she committed the murder after Mrs. Eyre's maid had left this room for the night, and went back to the nursery just before Hester Clarke, mounting the ladder through curiosity, discovered what had happened, and shrieked so as to arouse the house.'

Mr. Eyre did not reply. His habitual promptitude of judgment had deserted him; and though his conviction of Hester's guilt was shaken, he knew his long search for Frank to have been based upon a wrong impression, and

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he felt incapable of passing an opinion on the relative guilt of the two wretches he had surprised that night. When asked if the men should search the house, he assented, but did not accompany them, though with his own hand he locked Josephine in a room whence egress was impossible, having previously placed bread and water within her reach.

The happy idiot went willingly, but cried when he took the light away, till she fell asleep, hugging the diamonds in her arms.

He then returned to his wife's chamber, and sat down just within, not stirring till he heard approaching steps, when he rose, and, standing on the threshold, asked the chief constable if he had discovered anything.

'Nothing, sir—leastways only a child, all alone, and sound asleep, sir.'

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CHAPTER V.

'He entered in his house, his home no more ;
For without hearts there is no home—
And felt the solitude of passing his own door
Without a welcome.'

Mr. Eyre locked and barred the hall-door upon the searchers, then returned to his wife's bedroom, and, closing the window, drew the curtains before it.

Here the murderer had stood—what, *Digges ?* From here he must have seen her asleep in the chair that stood midway between bed and window ; beside it the diamonds, whose wicked shine in a dullard's eyes might have lit the way to an unprincipled, covetous woman beyond . . . but the gardener *Digges ?*

Dropping the curtain, Mr. Eyre advanced as though he were acting a part ; how easy to aim one blow at yon sleeping shape—to seize the diamonds, and escape by the open window—to hide them and return, dragged by the miserable power of the victim over its destroyer—to encounter Hester Clarke hurrying from the sight, upon which she had privily looked—to seize and fasten the guilt upon her, she keeping silence throughout her trial, knowing that a word would save her ! *Digges*, the murderer . . . mechanically he turned to a cabinet that stood near him, and opened a certain drawer ; then brought the

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light, and stood looking down fixedly on a dim outline traced upon the wood within.

Here the knife had lain that was afterwards found in Hester Clarke's possession, but who had placed it there? and did the same hand remove it? He lifted his own, and, as one who makes an experiment, stretched it towards the cabinet, his will making imperious question of his mind, as though he would wrest from it some secret that had been acquired against his knowledge, and must be forced to yield up to his command.

But force of will would not unbar that hidden chamber of his soul, locked even against himself, whose key he had lost, and his friend found.

'*God forgive you,*' Frank had written, when he had left Mr. Eyre's sick-bed to set out on his journey. '*I know the truth.*'

The truth . . . unless brain, ear, and eye mocked Mr. Eyre to-night, he knew that the clue held in Frank's dead hand out yonder was worthless, that the mystery of Madcap's death was for ever solved, and himself the sport of an illusion that had made the opportunity of a clown.

Hester innocent—for the gardener's overheard words cleared her of guilt—and he, that poor worm, that clod, *guilty*. A fierce sense of the meanness of the instrument that had compassed so great a crime alone moved Mr. Eyre's soul as, in that silent chamber, he realized his own bitter, black mistake.

'Yet, as his accomplice, Hester is as guilty as Digges!' he exclaimed aloud; then loathed himself for the stubborn pride that would not accept defeat, but sought to snatch aside the mirror which held him up to his own implacable self-contempt and condemnation. . . .

He took no comfort in the thought that Madcap's death

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was in no way a consequence of his sin, and thanked God neither for his innocence in this matter, nor for that of the woman he had well-nigh hanged. Hard and impenitent, he lifted his eyes not to God, but to self, and, with pitiless eye, scanned it as an enemy might, learning it through and through, its impotence, its ignorance, its pride.

In one vivid flash of light he saw illumined the puppet that had mouthed and strutted in his likeness—purblind, arrogant, the meanest actor in the tragedy of which it had believed itself the controlling force and avenger . . . marked its every antic and gesture, its insolent assumption of the Divine right of vengeance, while at its very side the Truth stalked, invisible to its bandaged eyes.

Yet even as he gazed on this vile travesty of himself, the man's soul, defiant, unyielding, exulted in the thought that at least *she* had not known him thus, but from first to last kept his image unblemished in the soul that she had laid before her Maker. Looking back, he had her love and honour; looking forward, his unquailing eye swept heaven and earth, and found them empty of love, duty, vengeance, ambition—and betwixt him and the half of one narrow chamber-room he coveted—nothing. He took the daisy from his breast that he had plucked growing above her head, and thought that it was well with her out yonder—but how had Lord Lovel earned the right to a long, deep slumber at her side?

Mr. Eyre started to his feet as one pierced by an intolerable pang, and, standing erect, with hands hanging at his sides, gazed straight before him, as if he actually witnessed a scene that evoked his strongest contempt and loathing.

And what did he see?

Come with me to the storming of the trenches before

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Sevastopol—see a sunny-haired young fellow beckoning on his men . . . see him, struck by a cannon-ball, reel from his saddle, while his followers trample him beneath their feet as they rush onward to victory . . . see how, amid a storm of shot and shell, a man rushes forward, and, lifting that yet warm body up, bears it away to a place of safety, where he tears aside the scarlet coat, only to find that the heart beneath is still—the heart that holds the lost clue to Madcap's death!

'Silent, with closed lips, unconscious of bravery,' so young that his mother in heaven could not have forgotten his likeness yet, the soldier lay—beaten in the fight, but with a gleam of victory shining athwart his wide-opened blue eyes and shattered features that, to one who loved him, might have seemed more nobly beautiful than the glance that had been his in life.

Yet, as enemy rather than friend, Mr. Eyre lifted that lifeless body and gently laid it down. He and the man before him had been comrades, sworn to one cause, and it had been no part of Mr. Eyre's scheme that either should die before it was won. No pity for that gallant fate stirred him—no memory of how he had loved his friend, and stolen his Madcap from him, softened his heart; only a bleak and a bitter rage filled his soul, that, after three long years of pursuit, in which he had wasted the whole forces of his brain and body, he had at last come up with the pursued to find him—dead.

'He should have been shot through the heart as a deserter, not buried as a hero,' Mr. Eyre thought, as he folded his cloak across Frank and left him alone in the rude hut, while he himself went to search for those proofs of the young fellow's identity that he must take with him to Lovel when he bore the body home for burial.

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He carried his life in his hand that night; but, as if he had been Belial's self, no harm touched him, and day was breaking when he found Frank's colonel—dying—but able to recognise Mr. Eyre as an old friend, and to answer his questions about Frank.

Lord Lovel had joined quite recently, and seemed to court death. He had confided to him, a few days previously, a packet of papers that he desired might be sent to Mr. Eyre if he fell.

These papers were on the dying man's body at that moment; and as Mr. Eyre drew them from above his heart, a fierce throb of hope animated him; for here perhaps Frank, though dead, spoke to him the truth.

As he tore them open, the dying man suddenly cried out:

'Has anyone seen Methuen? Take care there's no mistake . . . their own mothers couldn't tell . . .' then died with the unfinished sentence on his lips.

A withered bunch of flowers . . . a faded ribbon . . . a pale photograph of a girl's face made out of sunshine . . . half a dozen letters written in childish characters, and signed 'Your little sweetheart, Madcap' . . . one or two notes, of which the ink was fresher, and tone sedater, with the name of 'Eyre' added to that of 'Madcap' . . . these and no more.

Not a word to his friend—not a syllable to call back the awful burden he had laid upon him . . . and as, later, Mr. Eyre stood looking down upon that shrouded clay, he could have spurned it with his foot in loathing.

When the rude coffin had been made ready, Mr. Eyre and his dead set out for home, his mind a sullen blank, that last stage of the impotent rebellion against God that had for three years consumed him.

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As he landed with his burden on a bleak November night, there occurred to him a strange illusion.

Pure and sweet, like the far-off singing of a bird in a solemn aisle, suddenly rang in his ears the lines of an old ballad which Madcap had often sung, but to which he had never consciously listened:

> '"When will you be back, Lord Lovell?" she said,
> "When will you be back?" said she.
> "In a year or two—or three at the most . . ."'

Ay, it was HER voice, and she reproached him with Frank's death, which, indeed, lay at his door; for had not Frank meant to return? And was not his own pursuit of him the cause of that reckless throwing of himself into the jaws of death? Ay, verily his friend's death lay at his account, as did those other sinless ones whose memory he bore always about his path and ways, a weight to sink him to the remotest depths of hell itself. . . .

Yet, when the sound ceased, Mr. Eyre was himself again, and busied with a scheme that he at once proceeded to put into effect.

In Frank's name he telegraphed to Lovel news of his own death, convinced that Josephine would immediately communicate the news to Hester, so that he would probably find the two women together on his arrival. No matter what hidden clue Frank had held, in his soul Mr. Eyre knew Hester Clarke to be guilty; and it was with the implacable determination to convict her yet that he had approached his house that night, expecting to find her within it.

And on his very threshold he had been met by this sordid reading of the tragedy, a mere clue to which had made him a wanderer on the face of the earth for three

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long years, a clue that had made him put even Hester aside as one to be dealt with later; and now *if* Digges or Josephine were guilty—*if*—but what waste of time to speculate, when by that hour of the following day the man would be in the hands of justice, and his confession or his evidence taken down!

Hester guiltless, Frank exiling himself for a chimera; yet Mr. Eyre's stubborn soul rose up in the teeth of fact against the theory of Digges as the murderer, and denied himself to be a fool who had become the slave of a conviction, made blind by the obstinate inflexibility of his judgment, or that his strength had been his undoing, his immutability his curse, so that in the issues of his whole intellectual strength he had been worsted by a clod.

And yet, as a man who knows that across his eyes a film is stretched which hinders his perceiving at his very feet the object for which he painfully gropes, so Mr. Eyre's mind, while passively accepting Digges as the murderer, sought within his own breast for the true reading of a mystery that, while clear as day to all others, was dark as night to himself.

But as a side-thought will sweep a man out of the track of sober fact, and bid tragedy itself pause while he dallies with a folly, so Mr. Eyre's mind started off at a tangent to Madcap, and rested there, just as a mariner in drowning looks up to the patch of blue above him. So the darkened chamber, the white chair, receded from Mr. Eyre's eyes, and in their place he saw an old-fashioned garden, and a young girl stepping backwards down a ladder, as, aloud, she carefully counted the plums on the garden-wall.

Anon he saw the same young shape (but three months older) seated beneath the white plume of a thorn, whose

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blossoms were no paler than her cheeks, till a step on the turf made her turn, and the next moment two gentle arms, arms that trembled, but not with doubt, stole round his neck. . . . A trysting-place (six hours later), to which a young girl in a white gown came stealing—all her worldly goods tied up in her pocket-handkerchief, and nothing in life to keep her warm but her lover's arms. . . . A hurried marriage, at which an old friend of the bride's assisted, and then six years of such happiness as might make a wicked man in love with virtue, and look back with loathing on the pleasures he had found in sin.

And those arms had held her fast and safe through those six short, happy years—ay, and made to her so sure a haven that dreamlessly she had sunk to her last rest in them, knowing neither fear nor pain, so long as they were closed about her; yea, and even in the moment of death knew no pang, but called it the happiest moment of her life.

She had been happy to the last. Exultantly in that lonely chamber, Mr. Eyre lifted his brows to heaven, and cried aloud, that no matter what his suffering, sin, and shame might be, *she* had never suffered—and never would.

If to the world a piteous tragedy might have showed in the untimely death of one so young, lovely, and beloved, to her husband the thought was infinitely less moving than to see her living, the springs of faith and hope in her quenched—the soul and heart dying gradually, the body last, and he himself dishonoured in her eyes for time and all eternity.

There lay the root of it—*himself*—the fatal *Ego* that subordinated all things to itself, that had cast its sins behind his back and cried, 'Thus far and no farther'—

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opposing his puny strength to that of his Maker, and when overtaken by their pitiless consequences, trampling them under foot, arrogating to himself the Divine right of vengeance or mercy upon the objects of his hatred and his love.

Persons who had never studied human nature pointed to Mr. Eyre's constancy to his wife as a virtue; yet for the secret of such faithfulness one must look rather to the woman than the man, since one woman will fix what a hundred before her have missed, and will miss again, if once the touchstone to his faithfulness have not been found in herself.

Again, the world had discovered no congruity between the strong-brained man and the slender young mother of his children—found fault with the pair, and suspected some secret key to the riddle that to clumsy eyes and fingers was found in the circumstances of Mrs. Eyre's death. None guessed that his love for her had been selfish as his whole life; that it had neither humanized nor taught him to love others; how for her very children he had felt no affection, and if the thought of her son crossed his mind to-night, it was only to dismiss it instantly.

Let the boy look to himself. Mr. Eyre had been thrown very early on the world, without a mother's guidance, and with the example of a worse father than himself before him; and as to duty, why, the word had never held any meaning to his mind. Frank was dead; and now there lived not one soul whose heart might break for loss of faith in him—not one whose suffering it might break HER heart to see; so that he was bucklered and panoplied against fate, and with indifference could contemplate those past sins that had power to hurt no one now.

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Perhaps if her little prematurely born babe had lived (the babe that had been dying when he set out on his search for Lord Lovel), it might have borne some likeness to her, and he have loved it; but as it was, she had died, and so Madcap had

'Left the world no copy.'

Body and soul, he was worn out with the fires of excitement and disappointment that his three years' pursuit of Lord Lovel had cost him; and what wonder if, as the night drew on, his wearied spirit envied Frank his resting-place yonder, and for himself coveted but the half of one narrow mound? Perchance, as in the exquisite old fable of 'Abelard and Héloïse,' his true love's arm would open to enfold his body to her breast, and so at last they would sleep sound and sweet together.

Suddenly he rose, and stretched out his hands towards yon empty bed with the first purely physical, passionate longing for Madcap that had moved him since the fierce longing for vengeance on her murderer had steeled his heart against all natural love and sorrow.

'*Madcap!*'

The starved cry rang through the silent house as, pierced through all his armoury of pride by that living thought of her, the strong man awakened for the first time to the full desolation of his miserable lot.

Hark! what was that? A movement, rather than a sound, that stole through the empty house . . . then a faint stir as of something that approached waveringly and with many halts, till gradually the faint, pattering sound as of a child's bare feet upon polished boards drew nearer and nearer, till, on the threshold of Madcap's chamber, they paused, as though in fear or doubt. Through the fierce wrestle of his bodily weakness with

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the power that crushed him, these footsteps sounded but faintly, nor when a gentle hand pushed the door open, and a little shape stood on the threshold, did he move or turn, till, feeling something approach him, he tore his hand from his eyes, and angrily pointed to the door.

Who was it that dared intrude on him thus? He looked, but at first saw nothing; then downwards, and saw close beside him a child no higher than his knee.

He averted his eyes angrily, and, in a harsh voice, bade her begone. What did the murderer's brat *here*, intruding her paltry existence on him in this, the grand reckoning-hour of his existence?

Mr. Eyre understood neither the piteous helplessness nor the beauty of childhood; he had never studied, never loved a child, and this lonely, forsaken one touched no chord of mercy in his breast.

'Go!' he said, once more lifting his hand in the fierce gesture of dismissal that Madcap's children had so invariably obeyed. But the harsh look that sped like a blow fell faltering, for what was this?

Did he not know this face by heart—its eyes, its lips, the very sunshine of its glance, ay, the very dimples in its cheeks? was not this the very dawn of his own bright Madcap? . . . and this was *Josephine's* child!

Unconsciously he sank to his knees, she looking at him earnestly; then, with one of those angelic instinets of pity that will move a little child's heart to the comprehension of a tragedy it cannot *know*, and with no fear of that terrible face above her, she lifted a dimpled hand to his neck, and left it there.

'Is 'oo miserbul?' she said, in her tender little voice, and looking at him earnestly; then, finding something in his face that satisfied her, put her other arm round his

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neck, and gave him that first, best, purest gift earth can afford—a child's unbidden kiss. He received it as if he were stone . . . how long ago was it since anyone had kissed him? Then, putting her from him so harshly that any but a child would have been startled into the belief that he was angry, cried:

'What is your name?'

'I'se Madcap,' she said, and laughed aloud in the desolate chamber . . . and then Mr. Eyre knew that his reckoning-hour was stayed, for that betwixt him and God had passed the shield of a little child.

Here was Madcap's message to him from the grave, sent to him in his darkest, loneliest hour; here, in his grasp, was that divinest link between God and man—the hand of a little child.

Here, in the very moment that his life had practically come to a full stop, was a *heart* put into it. . . Ay! but through which to suffer, to be made human, through which to remember dead sins . . . though he knew it not, was not here his punishment, the instrument by which his stubborn soul was to be brought to submission to his Maker?

No such thought touched him as he bowed his head on the little innocent breast that took him with all his sins upon it, and, neither questioning nor doubting, knew only that he was in trouble, and that he was her friend.

'Can't find Joey *anywhere*,' she said, shaking the bright head that rested on Mr. Eyre's raven locks, 'and I *don't* like being left all by my lone self. Has 'oo come to stop?' she added suddenly.

'Yes!'

'What's oo' name?'

'I am your father.'

'Oh no!' said the child, looking at him with grave,

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lovely eyes; 'daddy's dead—Joey said so this afternoon. They're going to put him in the cold, cold pit to-morrow —poor daddy!'

She shivered a little as she said it, as if chill or afraid; and, as though it had been his Madcap's body that his own carelessness had put in danger, Mr. Eyre lifted the child, and, wrapping her in his cloak, carried her to the bed, and laid her down upon it.

She fell asleep soon, with her hand in his, and a shower of bright hair falling over them both; but presently he lifted himself, and took curiously a handful of that bright gold, then loosed it and kneeled down beside the bed that but an hour ago had seemed empty, beyond the power of God or man to fill it.

But what weakness was this? However much Madcap's image, there could be but one Madcap to him, and he had always hated children. . . . Why had this one come to him in his hour of weakness, when broken, worsted, he knew himself alike worthless in the sight of heaven and earth?

His stubborn pride rebelled . . . unconsciously he withdrew his hand from that sleeping clasp. . . . Yet morning found them thus, a child wrapped in a man's gray cloak, and a man who slept with his arm thrown around her, as though, even in his slumbers, he must clutch the one treasure that, in the shipwreck of his life, had been cast up from the very deeps at his feet.

* * * * * *

The same gray hour of dawn found Job gazing broken-hearted on the dead likeness of the only creature on earth that he loved. Speechless, bereft almost of reason, he had, on Mr. Eyre's departure from the churchyard, tottered home, to find a shrouded coffin in the hall, un-

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watched, unwept; but as the trembling old man sank on his knees beside it, a wild hope, conviction—what you will—seized him that the coffin did not contain Frank, but some other man whom, for reasons of his own, Mr. Eyre wished to pass off as Lord Lovel.

When the house was still that night, and the women sound asleep in their beds, with the key turned upon them, the gloomy hall showed a flicker of light, and Job once more approached, bearing certain tools that he laid upon the ground, with his lanthorn; then, pushing the pall aside, with a beating heart began his work.

The coffin was stout, and had been firmly soldered down. The sweat poured from Job's brows like rain as, with the strength of desperation, he toiled on hour after hour, the hollow blows waking ghostly echoes in the lofty hall, and dying away in shivering sounds along the vast corridors that for three years had been silent to the master's step.

But by daybreak the lid of the last inner coffin was loosened, and Job had only to lift it, to put the linen aside, and his doubts would be set at rest for ever; but when he had lifted the lid, his hand refused to travel farther, and, with a sob, the old man sank on his knees to the ground.

Better to have kept his belief that his idol was not there . . . to have clung to the hope that one day he would hear his foot on the stair, his voice in the hall . . . he would close the coffins up without looking, and keep his belief, and his suspicions of Black Eyre.

But even as he touched the lid to replace it, an overmastering impulse made him draw aside the linen below, to see before him, beautiful and calm in sleep, the features of his fondly-loved, dear 'little Master Frank.'

The ball that had half shattered the dead man's face

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had left his lips untouched and smiling, and the bright, frank expression that had made him so irresistible, yet lingered, while the impress of the gallant death he had died gave a nobler beauty to the young and almost boyish face of poor Madcap's sweetheart, and Mr. Eyre's friend.

For a while Job looked at him without stirring, and with his heart frozen. Then he stirred the short, bright hair of his 'boy,' as he always called this young warrior of over six feet in height, and touched the cold hand that had done its life's work so early and so well; but the shouts of the conquerors, the honour of the death that wrapped around his master 'with cloak of pilgrim-gray,' brought no comfort to Job, nor made less bitter the agonizing tears that at last dropped like lead upon his darling's breast.

He strove to replace the lid; but when, an hour later, the clamouring of the shut-up women attracted a gardener, who forced an entrance to the house, he found Lord Lovel lying with peaceful, uncovered face, and Job fallen in a fit beside him.

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CHAPTER VI.

'To identify ourselves with something wider and greater, that shall live when we, as units, shall have done with living, that shall work on with new hands when we, its worn-out limbs, have entered upon rest. The soldier who rushes on death does not know it as extinction ; in thought he lives and marches on with the army, and leaves with it his corpse upon the battlefield.'

By eight o'clock came riding in hot speed Colonel Busby, a magistrate of the neighbourhood, and the most pestilential busybody within it.

But when he came to the vast hall, whose lofty ceiling was still in gloom, while the light from the stained-glass windows fell but faintly on Lord Lovel's uncovered face, upon which, as yet, no change had come (with such incredible rapidity had Mr. Eyre brought him home), involuntarily he bared his head, and, coming to the side of the coffin, looked down with a real impulse of sorrow on the young fellow's face.

How well he remembered Frank Lovel in life, and how nobly the boy had taken on himself Mr. Eyre's sins ! and now the one lay dead, while the other lived and flourished, ripening, perhaps, for some new crime, and defying alike the justice of God and the opinion of man.

The busybody had come in warlike guise, secretly suspecting some mystery about Frank's death, but outwardly to demand by what right Mr. Eyre commanded the young

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man's grave to be dug and the burial to take place, before the process of identification had been gone through, or the heir and his advisers summoned. But as first one, then another came in, those who had loved Frank, those who had blamed him when he lay under the shadow of Mr. Eyre's sin—yea, and those who had pitied while they honoured him—all these, I say, as they wept, knew him; and as the hours wore on, and more and more people gathered, Lord Lovel lay in state, however humble, and was a hero, so that strong men wept for the thought of the manner of his death, and the women for the glimpse of the stain on his scarlet coat, above which his hands rested so quietly, their work being done. The sight of him was open to all, for Job was insensible, and the two women of the house scared beyond the power of interference. All that morning the tide of life ebbed and flowed about the dead soldier, for men's hearts at that time were aflame with the war, and no Lovel had ever gone so gloriously to his last resting-place as would this young fellow, with none to trumpet forth his deeds, and only the eloquence of death to speak for him.

Last of all came Mr. Eyre, and, without looking at those around, stood gazing down upon him, and might have spoken that most exquisite farewell which, addressed by Arthur to Lancelot, has never yet been matched in human language, nor ever will be.

Vast and sinewy as a gladiator of Rome, with a dark, stern face, upon which the fires of over forty years had legibly left their mark, Mr. Eyre stood like a second Saul among those around, too negligent of their presence to defy them.

If he were a humiliated man, if he knew his panoply of pride and vaingloriousness to have crumbled in ashes about him, and himself beaten at every point, *he* to whom

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fate itself had seemed to bow, however much in mockery, Mr. Eyre yet to-day carried himself as proudly as if he had neither sinned nor blundered, and the blood-red day of Gilboa were as yet undreamed of and unrisen.

Those around thought his face hardened, as he looked down on his dead friend; but his lips moved neither in blessing nor cursing, and none could have told whether the stern restraint of pain or the callousness of hatred held him motionless during the minutes that he stood beside him.

When at last he moved, it was with the old firm step and air of command, so that, involuntarily, the women around curtseyed, and the men pulled each his forelock, ashamed of their doubts of him, for Job's recognition had cleared the way for Mr. Eyre, and none durst suspect him of harm to Lord Lovel now.

Colonel Busby, whose keen eyes had never left Mr. Eyre's face since he entered, hurried out after him, and overtook him as he entered one of the avenues.

'You seem out of breath,' said Mr. Eyre, by way of greeting to a man he had not met these three years, and without offering his hand.

'I am,' said Colonel Busby, who, being extremely short and stout, resembled nothing so much as a gasping frog; 'but that telegram, Eyre; it must be seen into. What gross carelessness on the part of the Post Office people! It gave us all such a shock to hear — to hear——'

'That I'm alive,' said Mr. Eyre; 'exactly—it must have been a great blow to you after the telegram.'

'Well, well,' said Colonel Busby, colouring violently; 'it's a sad thing, you know—poor young fellow! but fortunate you were there to bring him home. Odd, too, as I suppose you were not fighting yourself?'

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'Not I,' said Mr. Eyre carelessly; 'it was a mere chance, my finding him.'

'And yet you've been together these three years?' said Colonel Busby, his inveterate curiosity not to be checked by the fact that all this time Mr. Eyre was walking away from him down the avenue.

'Have we?' said Mr. Eyre indifferently; 'then I suppose we're both dumb, for I have not exchanged a syllable with him since I left Lovel.'

The little man gasped with amazement and lack of breath, as he tried to keep up with Mr. Eyre's long stride, but the next moment he said:

'Then about that poor woman, Eyre; what a fearful blunder you made! And that lout of a gardener guilty, after all.'

'Ah, by the way,' said Mr. Eyre, pausing suddenly in his walk, 'have you heard anything about the woman? Has she been seen in the neighbourhood during my absence? You see, I look to you for all the gossip.'

'As a magistrate,' said the Colonel, puffing himself out, 'I am compelled to take cognizance of matters that do not come under the heading of *gossip*. I have certainly made it my business to inquire about this unhappy and persecuted woman——'

'By whom persecuted?' said Mr. Eyre.

To do Colonel Busby justice, he was no coward, and now he looked Mr. Eyre full in the face.

'By you!' he said, with a touch of dignity, not even to be marred by his absurd appearance. 'It was an inhuman persecution, since you could not have believed in her guilt.'

'Pshaw!' said Mr. Eyre, frowning; 'but I won't quarrel with you. "There is no railing in an allowed

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fool;" and, for the first time in my life, I find your conversation interesting. And pray whom *did* you think guilty?'

'Well,' said Busby, hesitating for a moment, but hardened by that allusion to his folly, 'it was generally considered that you ought to have changed places with the woman, and been tried for it yourself; but, being a fool, I only repeat what was of common report.'

'And what is your own opinion?' said Mr. Eyre grimly.

'What my opinion *was* matters little, now that there is not a shadow of doubt your gardener is guilty,' said Colonel Busby stiffly.

'Don't alter your opinion on that score,' said Mr. Eyre carelessly. 'I'm not at all sure that he did it—or if so, the woman Clarke was accessory to the crime, and deserved hanging. Now that I've done with Lord Lovel, I must have her found—I've been too busy to think of her these three years.'

'You will remain here?' said Colonel Busby, curiosity mastering dignity.

'To be sure,' said Mr. Eyre; 'I've found new ties' (he laughed) 'that will keep me here awhile; and there are Lord Lovel's affairs to arrange; the new heir is a mere lad, and I'm his guardian.'

Colonel Busby opened his mouth, but no sound came; for once, wonder silenced him.

New ties—what were they? Mr. Eyre guardian to the young heir—*he*—this man pre-eminent in evil, who carried things with as high a hand in defeat as victory!

'By the way,' said Mr. Eyre, 'I heard something about your coming over to have Lord Lovel's coffin opened—did you think I had killed *him* too?'

'The proceedings were informal—irregular,' said

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Colonel Busby stiffly; 'his next-of-kin should have been asked to the funeral, which, I am told, you have fixed for to-morrow.'

'Not I,' said Mr. Eyre, 'but for next day. 'You'll see the heir safe enough, and, no doubt, the lawyer—and the rest of them.'

'It must be a great relief to you to know that you are not morally responsible for your wife's death,' said Colonel Busby, gathering all his energies together to implant one poisoned shaft in Mr. Eyre's invulnerable hide.

'Almost as great a one as to know that I'm not *physically* responsible,' said Mr. Eyre grimly; 'and now you'd better run back to Mrs. Busby and retail your news—if any; you've filled *my* budget with food for a week.'

And Mr. Eyre went on his way down one of the three avenues that were the glory of the Towers and the pride of the Lovels—avenues that branched like three spokes of a giant wheel from the very hall-door, and gave endless variety to the outlook through every season of the year.

Mr. Eyre had walked them in all times and all weathers, often with Madcap, oftener with Frank; and he knew them in their every gradation of splendour, from their first timid veil of green, to their dazzling winter robe of white, when in dim perspective they stretched out like exquisite solemn aisles that a footstep below, or a bird's voice above, seemed to sound in only to profane; but this morning Mr. Eyre saw the avenue he followed in a new light, and, as it happened, was in a mood to observe it.

Dull and sodden as the day before had been, in the night the wind freshened, and by morning a gale had sprung up. The leaves of the trees, wasted to mere skeletons, danced in their thousands to the keen wind that smote them this way and that, and produced (with

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the sun shining through) an extraordinary effect, so that Mr. Eyre stood for a time looking, and thinking that he had never really *seen* wind before.

As he watched, its wild fierce spirit entered into his blood, and with it his own rose; he was once more himself, and the past night of his self-abasement vanished like a dream; he had been out of sorts, fasting, and had conjured up thoughts that the brisk morning air dispersed. His interview with Colonel Busby had refreshed him; his weapons might have rusted, but had not worn out; and even as a suspected murderer, he could hold his own yet.

And at the end of this avenue, that ran straight as the crow flies to the foot of the Red Hall, he would find somebody—something; and then the dance, the whistle, the rush of the leaves and wind blended, held him no longer, and he went forward, bent only on his thoughts.

Once he had gone this way with Frank and Madcap, and he had moved beside them like a ghost, *feeling* himself one, and looking on at the young pair who enjoyed the happiness that his death alone might be able to give them.

And now he walked the same path *living*, and knowing that, beyond any taking away of Frank, or any other, she was *his*, had been always his to the last beat of her heart; and even in dying had left him (so loath was she to leave him quite) a lovely message in her own image, that should reach and stay him in the first hour of physical and mental weakness that he had ever known.

He gave no backward thought to the dead now lying in the Towers. He had not forgiven him, and never would, even though Madcap had loved the boy; while to Mr. Eyre's own heart there had been no living soul (save her) so near to it as Frank Lovel.

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CHAPTER VII.

'I want to take up my cross and follow the true Christ—Humanity; to accept the facts as they are, however bitter or severe; to be a student and a lover, but never a lawgiver.'

No regular notification of the hour of Lord Lovel's funeral was sent out, or invitations to the county given; nevertheless, nearly every man of any consequence in it came, so that from the gates of the Towers to the churchyard there was an unbroken procession of men and women all on foot, as were the pall-bearers, and not a sign of ostentation or hired grief marred the spectacle.

Some of those present remembered that this was about the third anniversary of Madcap's burying; but there were no flowers on this coffin, nor did Mr. Eyre appear as chief mourner, but a bright-faced boy brought fresh from Eton, and looking round repeatedly for the only face he knew among the bewildering crowd at his heels.

But with his habitual contempt for laws and appearance, Mr. Eyre came last of all, leading a little child, whose dressing had possibly delayed him, as she had a boa tied on over her white pinafore, and wore a bonnet that certainly was never made for her, while a pair of her father's gauntleted gloves extended to her shoulders, and kept dry and warm the dimpled hands and arms beneath.

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Though they came last, the crowd divided, and the right of precedence at the grave was given them; indeed, a clear circle was left around the pair, that might have touched a less sensitive man than Mr. Eyre. But the only sign of feeling he gave during the Burial Service was when he looked down at the child's feet, and for the first time observing that she wore shoes, snatched her up, and, having stripped them off, chafed her feet, then wrapped them and her in his cloak, and stood impassible as before.

Madcap the younger had been quite happy as she trotted along beside him, and the sight of so many people, and some familiar faces, pleased her; but she was happiest of all when 'Dad' took her up, and from the eminence of his stature gave her a bird's-eye view of the proceedings, that ended in a long stare at a boy whose head did not reach her father's elbow as he stood behind it.

When that droll little head popped over Mr. Eyre's shoulder, the boy looked up, and fell in love at once with her; so that when her eyes dropped to him, and her rosy lips pouted to him in token of satisfaction, it was natural enough that he should reach up to, and kiss her.

He blushed for shame the next moment (being but a boy, and so much more modest than a girl of less than half his age), but presently a dimpled hand, hung temptingly over the blackness of Mr. Eyre's back, encouraged attention, and the boy put up his own, and allowed her to hold it. Colonel Busby was a witness to the little scene, and considered it unseemly to the last degree. The villagers whispered that here was the old story over again—a Lovel would love a Madcap, even to his own undoing, to the end of time. Most of those present

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thought of how Frank had led Doune at the older Madcap's funeral; and one or two saw, grudgingly, how Providence, in meting out its bitters, had kept some sweets for Mr. Eyre yet. His innocence, too, was clear, and men wondered that they could have doubted him; even Colonel Busby, with a sigh, swallowing his suspicions, and hating him worse than before.

Those who saw him that day—this terrible man, this monster of evil incarnate, who had stalked tearless, unheeding through tragedies at which an angel might have wept—with a little child clinging to his hand, prattling, looking up into his face with perfect trust and love, somehow felt their conviction of his Satanship rudely shaken, and in nearly every breast was wrought a revulsion of feeling towards him.

For children rarely love the bad, the cruel, and the coarse; their little hands go straight to the heart, and they know where they may love in safety; no deliberate murderer, no unclean heart, ever wins the childish trust that is divine, unerring, given royally at the first glance, and never taken back, save when most piteously misused.

Perhaps some of the men thought of how great had been his wife's love for him, and she had not been one to love unworthily; perhaps every woman present saw that he had dressed the child himself, and more than one mother's heart yearned to him as she marked the laboriously tied bonnet-strings, the clumsily knotted boa, and smiled, with a tear between, at the masculine intelligence that had put warm stockings on, but shod the little one with brown paper.

Mr. Eyre had glanced neither to right nor left among the crowd, so that if his compeers were present that day, he did not know it, and from first to last gave no one the

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opportunity of turning either a friendly or a cold face towards him.

The day was wild and blustering; he wrapped his cloak closer about the child as the service drew to a conclusion, and once made a gesture of impatience, as though he would hurry it.

When the coffin was lowered, an incident occurred that bid fair to reverse the favourable impression he had so lately produced. He advanced to the very edge of the grave, and for a full minute gazed down into its depths, and with his child's face (his wife's in miniature) pressed close to his own, Mr. Eyre had never shown more unfavourably than in that moment.

His look expressed a bitter unforgiveness, and undying anger, that deepened moment by moment to one of hatred that all who ran might read, and in one vivid flash illumined his past relations with the dead man, so that the old belief in his jealousy of his wife and Lord Lovel strengthened itself in the hearts of the startled lookers-on.

He seemed neither to see nor heed them, as he turned abruptly and left the churchyard, leaving the young pair side by side, without heeding the young heir, who obeyed a little commanding hand that beckoned him over her father's shoulder, so that the three entered the Towers together.

When the lawyer and others (including Colonel Busby, who must hear the will read, or die) came in, they found Mr. Eyre drying his daughter's shoes by the library fire, while she was feeding the heir with cake, and kissing him when her own mouth was not full.

He was like Doune, only older and kinder, and her little heart went out to him at once; while the boy (who had no sister, and only a fine-lady cuckoo-mother, who had

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never loved him), if he hung his head, and blushed a little (boys, as I have said, being so much more modest than girls), loved her, too, and took her image back to school with him that day, so that often, when alone, he would colour again at the thought of her, and long to feel the touch of those velvet lips again.

The Duke of Marmiton, who had been one of those passed unnoticed at the grave, on entering the room took Mr. Eyre's hand very warmly (not seeming to notice that it was his left, the right being occupied with Madcap's shoe), and bade him a hearty welcome home after his wanderings.

Mr. Eyre met these good wishes kindly, inquired for the Duchess, and, having dried the shoes to his satisfaction, put them on, and told the children to go and play quietly in a corner till he wanted them.

Meanwhile all waited, as people were wont to wait for this man, no matter what might be the rank of those who attended him; and when he came back to the fireplace, and gave the signal to begin, the lawyer commenced to read like an automaton, and in less than two minutes, so simply was the will worded, every soul present (save the children) knew its gist.

It was dated three and a half years ago, and immediately after Lord Lovel had returned from his long absence with his regiment abroad.

He bequeathed everything that belonged to him, unentailed, to Madcap, wife to Doune Hamilton Eyre, of the Red Hall; and failing her, to her daughter, should she have one; if not, to her younger son, Dody; and failing him, to her elder son, Doune Hamilton Eyre.

'Ten thousand a year, if it's a penny!' said Colonel Busby, almost before the lawyer had ceased to read; 'but it seems to me that the money and property will be

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kept together;' and he nodded towards the corner in which the two young heirs were playing, indifferent to the business talk of their elders.

'As guardian to young Lord Lovel,' said the lawyer, folding up the will, and addressing Mr. Eyre, 'you will, of course, arrange for his holidays, his education, and so forth, as you have done before. I drew up his father's will, in which you were appointed his guardian (though at that time no one ever supposed he would succeed to the title), and his mother has asked me to say that from henceforth she trusts you will assume a more active guardianship than you have hitherto done.'

'Let him come here when he pleases, or—stay—to the Red Hall; he cannot be much older than Doune, and they can amuse each other. Tell that very fine lady, his mother, that she need never try to stifle herself with country breezes as long as I'm alive, or leave her young new husband for an hour to concern herself about her boy—the only creature his father ever loved.'

'Geoffrey Lovel did well to leave his son in your care,' said the Duke gravely; 'but I wish we had Frank here, though he could not have died better.'

'Would to God he lived!' said Mr. Eyre, with a passion that he had never before betrayed; and one man present thought how finely he wore his mask of hypocrite, while the others blamed themselves the more for any doubts they might have harboured of him.

For gradually (there being no one to keep order) the room had filled, and many a friend and tenant of Frank, and Frank's father, heard Mr. Eyre's words; so that when he picked up his little daughter, and bade the young heir 'Good-bye till Christmas,' nodding in farewell to the lawyer and the rest, he passed out among men who

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had already half forgiven him for his strange behaviour by the grave.

'A most extraordinary will, and a strange guardianship,' said Colonel Busby, approaching the Duke, who was drawing on his gloves, and feeling that while he loved, he understood Mr. Eyre as little as ever, 'and a most extraordinary business altogether, I take it!'

'I see nothing strange in any part of it,' said the Duke coldly. 'The Lovels and Eyres have been friends for many generations, and these two men were extraordinarily attached to each other, in spite of—of—each wanting to marry the same lady. As to the guardianship, it is perfectly natural. Mr. Eyre and Geoffrey Lovel were intimates, and of about the same age; and Mrs. Lovel being a handsome woman' (the Duke had almost said 'jade,' but just checked himself in time) 'and likely to marry again, he did not wish to leave his son's prospects at the mercy of a step-father.'

'Well, well,' said Colonel Busby; 'there's nothing succeeds like success. He is to crow over us all, I suppose, just as he did formerly; and what's black in other folks is white in him; and he'll learn no lesson himself, but be for ever teaching us ours.'

'He has suffered severely,' said the Duke gravely. 'I was shocked at the change in him; and I think'—here the Duke raised his voice so that all around heard him—'it would be more seemly if further reference to past scandals ceased, the more especially as certain infamous rumours spread to Mr. Eyre's discredit have, during the past few days, been refuted beyond the shadow of a doubt.'

His people were in waiting without, and he went away after he had spoken, bearing himself well, in spite of his sixty-five years; and immediately after him came the

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young heir and the lawyer, who had travelled down together, and were leaving by the afternoon train for town.

'He's handsome enough, but none so bonnie as our own Lord Lovel,' was the verdict passed upon him by the crowd, that had encroached to the very doors of the Towers; but as the boy strode on through the early November dusk he thought nothing of his inheritance, but only of the Christmas holidays, when he would once more see little Madcap—that was her name, as she had been careful to tell him in the corner—Madcap Eyre.

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CHAPTER VIII.

'And in the heavens we now do dwell,
While ye maun drie the fierce fires of hell.'

From the moment that Mr. Eyre had shut the police out, he had admitted no one to his house save a stout kitchen wench, whom he had himself fetched from the village and installed in the kitchen, forbidding her to move beyond it, or to receive company therein, on peril of her instant dismissal. He did the foraging himself, and would stalk in with an armful of loaves and flesh; but the only culinary point upon which he showed anxiety was the child's bread and milk, and this he would have boiled to a nicety, standing over her so as to confound the woman, who had hitherto only curtseyed to him, trembling, from afar.

No trifle that affected the child's health or happiness was beyond his care or dignity; in the recesses of the scullery the woman often marvelled how 'master' managed to keep her so clean and neat, since, by all accounts, he had never troubled himself about his other children, or probably seen one of them dressed or undressed in his life.

Poor Moll, cut off from the village and that wing of the house in which the maniac slept, while only a flickering light in the nursery revealed Mr. Eyre's where-

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abouts, sometimes shuddered of nights, and wondered if she would be murdered in her sleep as Mrs. Eyre had been, and none be hanged for her murder. For Digges had not been caught yet; and at every stray sound the woman started, thinking she heard his tread, for she was possessed by a belief that Digges was in the house, having doubled on his escape, and, knowing every nook and corner of the place, hidden himself in one of them, issuing forth at night like a wolf to seize upon food. But such issuing forth was dangerous, since, with pistol in hand, lynx-eyed, and keen of hearing, each night Mr. Eyre watched from nightfall till dawn, having by day explored each place in which a suicide might hang, or a murderer hide.

The man was here, and, dead or alive, none but Mr. Eyre should find him; this he had vowed when, on the second day after his return, it became certain that Digges had never left the immediate neighbourhood. The keenest intelligence of Scotland Yard had not been able to discover one single trace of him beyond the spot where he had dropped from the nursery window; but Mr. Eyre's firm belief that he was somewhere *within* the house was negatived by the fact that no muddy foot-print or sign of such return was visible in any portion of the house.

One room only had been kept sacred from the detectives and other seekers; this was the bedroom of the late Mrs. Eyre. He went to it some two or three times daily, but spent the greater part of his indoor existence in the nursery, where, in feeding, washing, dressing, and amusing Madcap's child, he found himself sufficiently busy.

He could not endure to call in some rough village girl to take charge of her; he had written to town for such

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a person as he wanted, and meantime he could leave the child alone as often as he pleased, always happy, always singing, in all things the promise of that other bright, fondly-cherished Madcap, whose spring and early summer-time had belonged to Mr. Eyre.

He found his own independence of thought and power of endurance curiously reproduced in this little child of hardly three years, and perhaps was the more drawn to her that, though outwardly Madcap's very copy, inwardly she was himself, with his own strain of character, courage, and will.

He blessed Josephine that at least she had not taught the child *fear;* however negligent or unprincipled the Frenchwoman might have been, she had clearly not been unkind to her, and she had kept the child's person and linen exquisitely, so that Mr. Eyre had no trouble on the score of clothes, and with clumsy hands kept her as fresh and clean as a new pin.

From the first she had assisted him with her superior knowledge of buttons and strings, accompanied by low gurgles and chuckles of amusement at his expense that brought smiles to his grim face, and encouraged her to further liberties of love.

When, on the night after his return, she kneeled up close to his breast and said her evening prayers, he hearkened to her like one in a dream. How long ago was it he had heard such words?—

> '*In the Kingdom of Thy grace*
> *Give a little child a place!*'

It had been something like this that Dody was saying one morning when he surprised the young mother and her boys together, and he had harshly sent them away from her.

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Oh, heavens, how cruel he had been to her! He knew now what it must have cost her to unwind Dody's arms from about her neck, how his stifled sobs must have wrung her heart as the little brothers went heavily away . . . she had said to him once that he knew not the kingdom of love he missed in his children. Ay, but those were boys, and this was Madcap; and the only true love, the *universal* love, was as far from Mr. Eyre's heart now as ever.

The old jealousy of his character, too, was strong in him yet; he had winced that day when the child ran to the heir (for of the little pantomime by the grave he was ignorant) and kissed him; he was jealous even of Doune, whose name she mentioned with love in her confidences, revealing her brother in a new light to that in which Mr. Eyre had viewed his silent, stubborn son.

To-night, when she had fallen asleep in her little cot, Mr. Eyre sat for awhile watching her as a poor man may who hugs himself in the joy of a miraculously-found treasure; then, taking a light, went to his wife's room, and, as usual, bent himself to unriddling the puzzle that room contained.

Sooner or later, he was convinced that his mind would recover the lost clue that so eternally baffled him. Some day he would *remember* something that had happened in this room on the night of the murder, and that he had forgotten; for the knowledge was in his brain—perchance in some diseased cell of it, but it was *there*—and he knew it.

To-night the grim tussle between will and memory again began, but with the usual result; only that towards midnight came a strange interruption, and one that might have chilled the blood of a less strong-nerved man than Mr. Eyre.

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Moll was sound asleep in her distant kitchen; the child asleep in the nursery wing that faced Mr. Eyre as he sat, and in which a light showed. Josephine's room was empty, as she had been removed that morning to the County Asylum, still wearing the diamonds that Mr. Eyre hoped might inspire her with some gleam of memory or revelation.

All, as I have said, being absolutely still, a slight curious movement in the room attracted Mr. Eyre's attention, and as he looked to see whence it proceeded, gradually the door of a large hanging press in the dim distance opened, so slowly and deliberately that it seemed to be half pushed, half detained, by an invisible hand.

As Mr. Eyre gazed, he saw through the widening aperture the face of Digges, pale, and with a look of reproach, but neither advancing nor retreating, as Mr. Eyre sprang up and approached him.

His feet were on the ground, his arms hung to his sides; but as Mr. Eyre seized one of them, the figure swung forward loosely, and as if it trod on air.

As Mr. Eyre shook it, he realized the truth, and knew that once more, and this time finally, the truth had escaped him. The man had probably been hanging here since within an hour of his master's first return, selecting the very room in which the murder had been committed to put an end to his own life.

Here might have been found by some an evidence of his guilt; but Mr. Eyre had studied the man's face to some purpose before he called in the police next morning, and though he found intense terror and agony stamped on the gardener's features, he could not detect the look of the murderer who leaps into Eternity, fearing to come face to face with his victim.

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But none held with Mr. Eyre's belief in the man's innocence; and it was only by the exertion of great influence that the master of the Red Hall obtained for him Christian burial; while for many years to come the little children at play in the churchyard avoided the grave of one who was now accepted by all as the murderer of Mrs. Eyre.

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CHAPTER IX.

'But curse not him; perhaps now he,
Stung with remorse, is blessing thee.
Perhaps at death; for who can tell
Whether the Judge of heaven and hell
By some proud foe has struck the blow?'

Mr. Eyre was now at leisure to think about Hester Clarke, and the very day after Digges' hardly-won burial, he went into the village, and going first to the house in which she had lodged, got there nearly all the information he wanted.

The house was his own; the woman who answered his questions a tenant who paid her rent irregularly; yet she replied to Mr. Eyre's questions with bare outward respect, and the curtest answers that truth permitted.

Hester Clarke had left the place on the morning after the funeral of Mrs. Eyre and her child. She had announced her intention of joining her former servant, Janet Stork, now undergoing penal servitude for the murder of Hester Clarke's child.

Mr. Eyre asked if there had been any interview between the woman Clarke and Lord Lovel the night before she left.

'*Woman*, sir!' said Mr. Eyre's tenant, as if she felt keenly his insult to the whole sex; 'well, none but a woman would have spent a whole November night face

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downwards on wet sods. When I got her home at dawn, there was as little life in her as her worst enemy could have wished.'

'She saw Lord Lovel before she left?' said Mr. Eyre, reading the woman's soul like an open page.

'Ay; but I don't know all he said to her. It seemed to me, from a word or two I caught, as if they was agreed to shield some guilty person'—here the woman's cold eyes scanned Mr. Eyre; 'but I heard nought about the innocent being made to suffer, and Digges deserved honest burial as much as I do.'

'So whatever secret knowledge Frank had, Hester shares it,' thought Mr. Eyre, looking round at the humbly furnished room that he had only hitherto seen from without, then turned to the woman and said:

'You have heard from Hester Clarke?'

'Ay—once by whiles.'

'She is permitted to see Janet Stork?'

'Ay—once by whiles.'

'She has thoughts of coming back?'

'That's as may be. There's some to whom she'd be none so welcome.'

'Tell her, when you write,' said Mr. Eyre, 'that the sooner she comes home the better; and, if she doesn't, that I shall go out to fetch her. We have some scores to settle, she and I.'

'I'll tell her, sir,' said the woman, dropping an abrupt curtsey as he opened the door to depart; 'but I think the place is hardly safe for her—she's best where she is.'

'But she will come here, all the same,' said Mr. Eyre carelessly. 'By the way, you have altered the arrangement of this room; that chair used to stand *here*,' and he pointed to a particular spot.

'Yes, sir,' said the woman, in her rigidly civil, sullen

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way; 'but after the tramp's evidence at the trial, I moved it, lest folks might be tempted again to shoot if anyone happened to be sitting there by night.'

'To shoot?' said Mr. Eyre, looking at her keenly.

'Another murder, besides the one committed at the Red Hall three years ago, was as near as possible committed in this room that night, as you are well aware, sir,' said the woman; 'only the man who dodged about with his pistol outside yonder window thought better of killing Hester Clarke, and went away, perhaps to kill that poor young lady, your wife; but God alone knows.'

'Ay,' said Mr. Eyre, 'and I'll know, too, before I've done. So you never thought her guilty?' he added, his eyes reading the woman's soul.

'SHE?' said the woman incredulously. 'I got to know her through and through in the six months she was here —and she was a good woman to her heart's core.'

Mr. Eyre thought of Madcap, and how she might be alive now but for Hester Clarke's crossing his path, and bringing to light a buried sin, and his stern features darkened as he turned to go.

'She has bribed you, I suppose,' he said. 'Well, give her my message when you write;' and he went out.

The woman stood looking after him awhile as he mounted his horse and rode away, the hatred of her glance dying out in slow, bitter tears, that seemed to furrow her cheeks as they fell.

'Loved her, wronged her, hated her, and would have hanged her if he could—he tried hard enough,' she muttered aloud, as Mr. Eyre disappeared; 'and Hester never did him any harm, never thought it, but just stayed on and on, because she couldn't tear herself away from his child, the image of her own, that got drowned by Janet's misadventure; for Janet never meant to kill it, though

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she's got fifteen years' penal for it, and I doubt if she'll ever come out alive. And Hester will stick by her—only to think of that beautiful creature set among felons! I never saw her match for looks; even our poor young lady (God bless her, and God pity her for being wife to such a man!) couldn't touch her there.'

The woman dried her eyes, and looked round before she pulled down the blind that she had drawn up in Mr. Eyre's honour.

'So he remembered *that*, and how the chair stood; I wonder he wasn't afraid to say so—but he fears nothing; he's the Devil himself! And she never said a word agen him—'twas only what I heard at the trial, and through the keyhole when Lord Lovel came, that I glimpsed her heart. P'raps I'd been a bit cold-like at first when she came to lodge here—knowing she'd been a mother and no wife, and Lord Lovel said to be the father of the child. But not a blink of harm could I ever see between the two; and he never crossed the threshold but once, the morning Lord Lovel set out for foreign parts. I'll write the message, sure enough, and tell her *Digges* is found out to be the murderer—for dead tongues can't speak, and perhaps those that can, won't; and so here's the Devil over-riding us all again, as if there was no heaven above. Write to her! To be sure I will, and warn her, too—we want no more murders here.'

But Mr. Eyre, as he rode homewards, thought little of the woman's significance of manner: his mind was occupied with the main fact that Hester Clarke was within reach of a month's voyage, and that at any given time he could lay his hand on her; and this certainty enabled him to turn without haste to the remodelling of his establishment, and other affairs that had fallen somewhat into neglect during his long absence.

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To be sure, he had left an agent in charge of his estate, and the man had done well, but not *too* well; so that Mr. Eyre for many days found duty out of doors, after which he took his pleasure within.

The nurse had arrived from town, a woman in early middle age, who had lost both husband and children, and so understood little Madcap, who now occupied her new nurseries opposite Mr. Eyre's bedroom, so that he could see her at any moment, whether he crossed to her, or she to him.

People marvelled that he should care to sleep in his late wife's bedroom, the scene of two tragedies; but since the child had no fear of the room, neither had he, and their pranks were carried on morning and evening, as Madcap Eyre would have loved hers with her boys to be, had their father only permitted it. If a housemaid crossed the threshold shuddering, and Mr. Eyre saw it, he sent her away, saying he would have no servant with diseased nerves in his house; and as the regular staff of domestics was gradually made up, assuredly none but strong-nerved persons found themselves appointed, though they experienced little enough to alarm them. Mr. Eyre neither walked in his sleep, rose at unholy hours, nor got into rages; and the household quickly became as quiet and orderly an one as was to be found in the whole county.

Where he had laid his routine of life down, three years ago, he now took it up, without a lost stitch; nothing was omitted or forgotten. And when he took his place on the bench with his brother-magistrates, it was with the old impulse of admiration that they welcomed him.

He had done amiss, but in their thoughts they had wronged him, and the Duke's example was not to be gainsaid; while those who had a secret sin or two on

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their consciences felt the more warmly to him, as one who had vicariously borne their punishment, so that the attitude of the whole county was friendly, and a considerable surprise to Mr. Eyre. This was the second time that he had rehabilitated himself in his world's esteem; and Colonel Busby, standing aloof, mused to some purpose on the folly of human nature, though to very little effect on his own.

His curiosity was so insatiable, that he could not give up visiting at the Red Hall, and so consenting to the iniquity of Mr. Eyre's presence among his peers; but he found little enough to reward his investigations there. Mr. Eyre's life was that of a simple, everyday country gentleman of large estates, who devoted all his spare time to a little daughter; so that often you would meet the pair on foot, or even on horseback, she on the saddle before him, with the reins in her hands (though he held them too), and delighted with the fancied skill that urged on or restrained the favourite black that Mr. Eyre invariably rode.

They came to be a familiar enough sight in the village, where formerly Mr. Eyre had been rarely seen, save by his wife's side; and the women pitied, and the men forgave him his past as, day by day, he went among them, always with the little child, whom he led carefully, and not as an ignorant or heedless mother would, suffering her to fall into danger; while his cloak was ever ready to receive her when she showed fatigue; and in all this no touch of ridicule attached itself to the stern, proud man.

But though outwardly her slave, he demanded, and got, a due subservience of conduct, both at home and abroad, that he had not obtained by coercion, but by a curiously mutual concession of wills.

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She was so fearless, and his own fibre was so strong in her, that anyone but he might have taken her courage for obstinacy; but he knew better, and by no restraint or harshness would have shaken a feather from the crown of independence that sat so well upon her baby brows. For when the child came to him in the depths of his despair, he got a glimpse of a life beyond—as a streak of light on the ocean will show to one who stands in the darkness on a storm-encircled promontory: and beyond himself he saw something for which he might live, while *for* himself he could only die.

Here was the aftermath of his life, as the furze cropped by the lambs in spring bursts out defiantly in golden autumn blossom, delighting the gazer with unexpected riches, and knowing itself secure from any second destruction.

By the time little Madcap was grown up, the story of her mother and his own sin would be forgotten; and as he had shielded her mother from that knowledge, so he would make shift to shield her daughter after her.

Already he was used to the strong, fresh current of healthy life that a child brings with it; already he was learning the unselfishness that a child's daily presence teaches one, and by degrees his soul and mind opened to the beauty and preciousness of that 'children's kingdom' that is ever among us, and by which we might keep our hearts pure and undefiled, would we but oftener seek to enter it.

For in the love for little children is no passion, only a yearning tenderness, through which the universal, the only true love is learnt; and those who watched Mr. Eyre, said that the will of the man was learning submission to his Maker through his heart, and that by the hand of a little child was he being led back to God.

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For every Sunday you would see the pair in church, though in his wife's lifetime he had not gone there a score of times, and this regularity of attendance had been inaugurated by the little one herself in those first days when Mr. Eyre was entirely her slave.

'Bells going—church-time,' she had said, standing still to listen, the first Sunday morning after Mr. Eyre's return; 'come along,' she added, pulling at his hand.

And so they went through the village together, past the older Madcap's grave, and Frank's fresh one, appalling the sanctimonious, and rejoicing the villagers by the unorthodoxy of their appearance.

I think that most of us are conscious of a desire sometimes to be able to go back to the traditions and beliefs of our youth. A line from an old hymn, the turn of a well-remembered tune, will for a moment renew in us the devout, unquestioning faith of our early years, so that we return to our everyday life with a curious sense of its worthlessness and our shame.

And as a man who thrusts a cup of healing from his lips, crying out that he loathes, though he has never tasted it, so until now Mr. Eyre had disliked children —those crystal shapes that, so long as we do not try to cast them to our own mould, keep their Divine freshness.

His books became stale to him beside this fresh and exquisite page of childhood, over which he gathered fresh draughts of strength and happiness as he read.

To hear her sing, in that little pure, thin, sweet voice, unlike anything else in the world (and that is to sound what the freshness of dawn is to morning), gave him a queer thrill of joy; while her prayers, said at his knee, brought to his eyes that intolerable smart which is a strong man's way of weeping.

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'You *not* a bad man,' she cried one night, in a passionate burst of tears, when some hasty expressions of anguish escaped him; and in this, perhaps, lay her strength, that she trusted, and was absolutely fearless of him, as her mother had been; so that she reinstated him in his self-esteem, and, secure in the worship of the only thing he loved, Mr. Eyre faced his world defiantly, as of old, not caring one rush for its evil or good opinion.

Children grow *towards* you, men and women away from you; and every day Mr. Eyre felt more secure of his treasure, tested more jealously the docility, courage, and beauty of the spirit that had his wife's finer qualities, and his own strength.

Harshness was not needed here, and on one occasion only he had nerved himself to punish her, and then by solitary confinement.

But, as he turned the key on her, he felt as though it were his own idolized wife that he treated thus harshly, and anxiously listened for the first sound from within.

For a full minute there was silence; then toddling steps approached the door, and a young, sternly rebuking voice said through the keyhole:

'*Dad!* are you good *now?*'

Before the inexhaustible dignity of childhood, the man's sank, leaving only the better part, so that he was often engaged in offices for her that he would formerly have despised.

But his was not that fondness for her which would—

> 'Nourish the frame, destroy the mind,
> Thus do the blind mislead the blind,
> E'en with a mother's love . . .'

only as yet he found no seeds of evil to check, nor any one

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of those outbursts of temper that he had often observed in his eldest son.

Yet, on looking back, Mr. Eyre prided himself on the thought that, if he had been harsh with his boys, he had at least never oppressed or punished them. And, indeed, the struggle for supremacy between the grown-up being and the child must always be an ignominious one; the result is always a foregone conclusion, and the crueller we are, the surer we are of the victory. And if we cannot think with the child's mind, we are apt to look upon his troubles as trifling, though, if our memory for suffering were not so faint, we should remember what agony those childish troubles were to us once; how their intensity was increased by the narrow scope of a child's mind, everything to it bounded by the present, the utmost stretch of imagination never carrying it beyond 'to-morrow.' Its miniature powers do not enable it to look around, and take comfort in reflection; it only intensely comprehends its present hour of misery. And if one doubts that children suffer even more keenly than grown people, let them read from time to time in the newspapers of some poor maddened child, who, in the unbearable agony of spirit that possesses him at some needlessly harsh reproof or barbarous punishment, wanders out, his numbed, helpless brain in a whirl, and, unable to look *beyond*, as a grown person would, takes the irrevocable step that plunges it into Eternity.

For the harsh, cruel words that would take no effect on a man or woman, are literally accepted by a child, and may prove the turning-point of his life (if it do not drive him to despair), hardening firmness to obstinacy, gentleness to cowardice, and weakness to vice.

To such a fate as this, Mr. Eyre had unconsciously done his best to drive the boy whom he took pride to

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himself that he had never punished. True, he had never beaten him, nor even been unduly harsh, save when the child diverted his mother's attention from *himself;* but when that mother died, the mother whom the boy worshipped, and who had been the religion of his young life, the father had not a thought to give to the five-year-old boy whose heart was silently breaking in the loneliness of his nursery, and in whose mind was slowly growing a repressed, bitter sense of ill-usage that might warp his character for ever.

Doune knew that his younger brother Dody had been his mother's favourite child; but this could not affect his silent, intense love for *her*, and full well he knew that she had loved him too. If she had petted his brother more than him, it was because the two were so utterly unlike in disposition—Doune all strength, Dody all sweetness; Doune passionate, proud, unforgiving, very rarely showing a sign of affection for even his mother, in all essentials the opposite of Dody, who seemed made expressly to win love. An impression once made upon the boy seemed indelible, and his father's harshness had gradually alienated the child's heart from him so entirely that it seemed impossible there could be any cordial understanding between them in the future.

But the one tie that bound the boy to life, that saved him from some rash deed of despair, was the baby-sister that his mother had left in the nursery when she went away, and Dody had so gladly and quickly followed her.

It was a girl, and it had been named after his mother, and might grow up like her; and hour after hour the boy would sit by the little frail babe, whose every hour threatened to be her last, so that when he was taken away to school, he kissed the tiny face with a bitter black

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despair in his young heart, thinking that he would see her, too, no more.

Mr. Eyre was entirely ignorant of the antagonism to him in his young son's mind; he had never given him half a dozen consecutive thoughts in his life, and, having sent him to school before his departure for abroad, did not even remember him till the night of his return home. The boy was well enough, no doubt; as to his holidays, no doubt the lawyers had provided about that, or so Mr. Eyre thought, till one day little Madcap began talking about her brother, she having to all appearance entirely forgotten him, until an accident brought him to her mind.

Mr. Eyre was holding the younger Madcap up to the portrait of the older one, which had been painted in the heyday of her youth and love; but the child, after gravely looking at it, shook her head and said:

'I *don't* remember her!'

'That is your mother,' said Mr. Eyre.

'No! that's a young gell,' said little Madcap, still disbelieving; 'but Doony come here every day, and talks, and talks, and *talks* to her, and sometimes he fall sound to sleep, and Jocey and me *can't* wake him up. P'raps he doesn't like to leave her up there all by her lone self.'

The little wistful ignorant face smote Mr. Eyre with the first pang for his son that he had ever known, but there was jealousy in his voice as he said:

'You love your brother Doune?'

She nodded her bright head emphatically.

'When's Kismus?' she said. 'Doony come home Kismus, and *Dad* shall make us a Kismus-tree!'

Mr. Eyre made a grimace as he carried Madcap away; but to her every extortion he submitted, since for each sin of omission to Dody, he now paid with fifty of self-

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sacrifice to his little daughter, perhaps with some secret hope that his wife knew it, and accepted this expiation of his hitherto neglected duties of fatherhood. He would be kind even to Doune for her sake; and no doubt the boy still remembered his mother, though he had been a stubborn, silent child, without a trace of her nature in him, and full now, no doubt, of his school-pursuits beyond the comprehension of a baby-sister.

Yet already that instinct of jealousy, which had never so much as a shadow to pass betwixt him and what he loved, was awakened in Mr. Eyre, and unconsciously he watched the child each day, feeling himself wounded if in her talk Doune's name was uttered.

That night he wrote to his lawyers for an account of Doune's holidays in his absence, and by return of post read that no arrangements having been made for the boy's Easter, Midsummer, and Christmas, he had spent them at the Red Hall with his sister, having resolutely run away homewards from school each time his holidays were due, till, to save scandal, he was formally permitted to return, as no doubt Mr. Eyre (though he had accidentally overlooked the matter) would have wished. It was early in December when Mr. Eyre got this letter, so that in a fortnight, or thereabouts, the boy would be here; but perhaps he did not realize how profound a change Doune might work in his everyday life, till one morning when little Madcap ran into his bedroom, in her hand an unopened letter.

It was addressed to her own sweet, small self, and she kissed it lavishly before she laboriously undid the envelope and permitted 'dad' to read it to her.

'"DARLING MADCAP"' (ran this letter from the eight-year-old boy, laboriously written down to the com-

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prehension of three years),—'"I shall be home very soon. You get Joey to put fourteen apples in a row, and you eat one every day, and when you come to the *very last* one, you will see me. I hear father has come home, but don't you be afraid of him; he won't beat you, and soon you'll have me *to take care of you.* Tell Joey to be sure and dust mother's picture *every day.* I shall be able to do it myself without the steps *soon,* and tell Digges, with my love, not to forget the flowers for the place where you and I go every morning, and where we'll go again when I come back. I have got you a doll that opens and shuts its eyes——"'

'I'd rather have you or Doony to talk to,' said Madcap the younger, wrinkling up her small nose with an air of disgust; 'dolls never says *nothink!*'

'"And a white rabbit,"' resumed Mr. Eyre, reading; '"and I'm going to teach you your alphabet; mother taught me mine when I was only two. I shall make the white rabbit a hutch in the nursery, so that you can run in through my room of a morning to look at it without catching a cold; and I hope Joey keeps your feet dry, because poor Dody died from getting his feet wet, you know."'

'Going out without any shoes or stockings to pick a birthday-gift for mamma,' said little Madcap, nodding.

'"And if you were to die, I should drown myself, and no one would be sorry except Digges. And don't you cry, if father is unkind to you; only cowards cry; and *I'll* take care of you safe enough when I come back. Good-bye, and God bless you, ducksy little Madcap, and with my dearest love and a kiss,

'"I am, your ever-loving brother,

'"DOUNE."'

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'*Dear* Doony!' said the child; 'and a white rabbit' —she hugged herself all up together for joy. 'Have to go back to my nursery now, and leave dad—poor old dad! Naughty Doony, to say you're cross; you're always kind to me, and I'm kind to you, *aren't* I?'

But for the first time since those dimpled arms had stolen round his neck, Mr. Eyre unloosed them, and set her down, his jealous soul angrily realizing that he possessed only a half-share—not the whole of her heart, and that Doune had got three years' start of him in her love.

From that moment the silent struggle between father and son began; and in both hearts the hostile spirit burned clear and strong, for the man had learned no lesson; here was his old selfishness of character over again, and he was repeating the very sin (his only one in her eyes) that had so wounded his wife, and made her exceeding love for her children as a joy but half-tasted, since he would not share it.

But after that one impulse of anger against his little daughter because he was not the *only* human being that she loved, he devoted himself to her more than ever, riveting her to himself more closely with fresh chains each day, and putting forth his every charm and power of commanding love to win the simple, tender heart of the three-year-old child, in whose breast he must be first or nothing.

And out of the full cup of her childish tender heart she repaid him richly, looking to him more and more each day, so that she even forgot Doune's home-coming, and did not remember the fourteen apples that she was to count and eat, one for each day, though Mr. Eyre reckoned the very hours grudgingly, enjoying them with a zest that uncertainty always roused in him, though other men might meet it with dread.

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He was paltry in nothing, and that very day gave orders that Doune's old room should be prepared, and Madcap's abandoned nurseries refreshed and made comfortable for her return. However he might miss the little morning footsteps that were wont to patter over to his door so early that he had given up reading of nights since he was wakened at cockcrow, he never thought of dividing the children. He would be no tyrant; not one single restriction of duty to himself should hedge in his little daughter's heart. Free as air she should come and go, make her choice between him and Doune; for that any human being could love two persons equally was beyond Mr. Eyre's understanding.

Yet his wife had been able to love—not one, but three—equally; she had fused children and husband alike into one perfect love that had filled her life with a song of joy, to which soul and body danced a measure far beyond the power or comprehension of a Mr. Eyre.

Grimly he counted the hours to Doune's return—even took down from his library-shelves some of those books that had grown stale to him since his new readings had begun, and arranged to go into certain matters of business with his steward that had for above a month been waiting his attention. He would have time enough for all such things when once the children were together; but the night before Doune's return Mr. Eyre sat so long by his little daughter's bedside that the nurse fell asleep from weariness in the adjoining room.

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CHAPTER X.

'Alone among his young compeers
Was Brian from his youthful years.'

Mr. Eyre did not go down to the station to meet his son, but sent little Madcap and her nurse; so that when the tall, handsome lad jumped out of the train, a little unexpected toddling shape rushed into his arms with a shout of joy, and kissed him with all her soul.

'Darling, ducksy Madcap!' said the boy, devouring the velvet cheek of his idol; 'and I've got the rabbit here all safe—and what a smart little girl it is!' he added, as he put her down.

'Dot a new muff,' she said, showing her unusual finery with pride; 'and a new bonnet' (she pushed it to one side), 'and new boots—*lots* of buttons,' and she extended one pretty leg, and held up her petticoats to show it; 'and lots of new frocks at home—haven't I, Nan?'

'Yes, Miss Madcap,' said the nurse; 'you've got plenty.'

'But where is Josephine?' said the boy, looking at the woman; 'has father sent her away?' and the hot blood showed in his cheek as he spoke.

'Oh no,' said little Madcap, as her nurse hesitated; 'I think she's sick; she's dorn away ever so long ago. Oh, what a *dear* little rabbit!' she added, peeping into the covered basket Doune carried.

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And in her excitement over it, the boy's frown vanished; and soon the young pair were driving towards Lovel, the nurse being seated beside the coachman, so that there was no hindrance to the children's talk.

'How is Digges?' said the boy presently. 'I hope he's kept my dog all safe, and——'

'Oh, Digges is dorn too,' said little Madcap; 'he went away before Joey; 'specks something's happened to him —poor Digges!'

'So that's how my father is beginning,' thought the boy, with darkening brows: 'they were good enough to take care of Madcap for years, but he cleans them out directly he comes back;' only perhaps he did not use these exact words, though this was the gist of his eight-year-old thoughts.

'Never mind, ducksy,' he said, as he put his young arm round her, '*I'll* take care of you now; and we'll have a merry Christmas all to our own selves, for *he* won't trouble us much.'

But Madcap was too much taken up with the white rabbit to notice the allusion to her father, and had, indeed, altogether forgotten him till some accident should bring him to her mind.

The sun was setting in blood-red behind the furze-crowned rock that gave Mr. Eyre's house its name, as the children approached it; but Doune looked first towards his mother's room, the window of which now stood open.

At the house-door there were servants only to receive them; and at once the boy suffered himself to be led away to the nursery, where, finding everything just as it used to be, his spirits rose, and he busied himself about looking over old belongings, and arranging fresh ones.

The nurse had gone to the garden to fetch food for the

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rabbit, and not until the two were half-way through a gorgeous tea did Madcap remember her father.

Doune saw her eyes suddenly widen as she put the morsel down untouched she was carrying to her lips, and wondered what was coming, as she lifted two dimpled hands in a child's dramatic way, and nodding with intense gravity, ejaculated:

'*Dad!*'

Doune stared. When had he and Dody ever called that terrible man anything but 'father'?

'*Poor old dad!*' said Madcap in an accent of intense pity. 'I'se quite forgot him; come along of me and see him.'

She had got down from her high chair, and pulled at the boy's hand as she spoke; but though he went with her, it was unwillingly, and with his heart hardening at every step.

Mr. Eyre, busy with his steward, heard those short and longer steps approaching his study, but did not look up, even when the door opened, and the young pair came in.

'*Dad!*' cried little Madcap, rushing to her father and throwing her arms round his neck in an irrepressible burst of joy, 'here's Doony—Doony's come 'ome!'

The boy stood where his sister had left him, and over Madcap's head the eyes of father and son met, and the hostile spirit in each heart strengthened; but as the boy did not stir, neither did Mr. Eyre; and if in this moment the former failed in respect, so assuredly did Mr. Eyre in his duty towards the motherless lad whom he had not seen these three years.

If the one had made a single step forward, if the other had beckoned; or perhaps if the slender, dark, stubborn boy had borne ever such a faint resemblance to Madcap,

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or owned a tithe of Dody's winning ways, Mr. Eyre might have given him some cold corner in his affections. As it was, in every line of the boy's defiant face and figure he saw *himself*—that ugly self from which he had lately turned aside with loathing.

The scene that made father and son avowed enemies lasted scarcely as long as the kisses little Madcap was remorsefully showering on her father.

'Me and Doony having tea now,' she said, scrambling out of the arms that held her but loosely; 'we'll come back bimeby.'

And, without a backward thought or look, she ran to Doune, and vanished with him through the open door.

Mr. Eyre resumed his business on the instant, as if no frivolous interruption had occurred; but when the man had left, he went to the window, and looked to see what lights had been kindled in the nursery wing facing him.

There was only one in the day-nursery, but Mr. Eyre remembered Doune's care of his little sister's feet, and had no fear that the two were abroad; only as he dropped the blind it struck him that his wife from opposite might even thus have watched *his* light, as hour after hour he sat among his books, leaving her lonely, save for her children.

On the very night that she died, he had so left her on some paltry errand of scribbling, though on this occasion she had Lord Lovel to bear her company, and to Mr. Eyre the hours had passed unheeded, till the cry of 'Murder' roused him, and he had ascended the private staircase to find her unconscious, and stabbed to the heart.

But to-night the neglect lay not with him, but with Madcap's daughter, who had not a thought to give to the man

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who presently ate his solitary dinner and dessert without a ripple of the tender voice that had been wont to adorn it.

His dinner-hour had long been put back to six in recognition of her bedtime, which was seven; but eight had struck, and Mr. Eyre was in his study, when a knock at the door sounded, and Madcap's nurse set her down inside it, half asleep, and bundled up in shawls. She climbed on to his knee with difficulty, and pushed his book away.

'Come to say my *pairs!*' she said; and the next moment had fallen sound asleep on his shoulder.

Mr. Eyre signed to the woman to go, and with exultation thought that at least the child had remembered him *twice* in all the rapture of Doune's return; and when in an hour's time he carried her back to the nursery, he had so far softened towards the boy that had they met then, a better feeling might have been established between them.

But Doune was not there; with jealous heart, and counting each moment an eternity, he had for a long while waited his little sister's return; but when half an hour had passed, he went where he had always gone when in trouble—to his mother's picture. No matter that the room was in darkness; she was *there*, a living, abiding reality to him, and all things good and evil in his heart he laid before those lovely mother's eyes, that never failed to bring healing to his soul.

'Mother,' he said aloud, and with his hand on the picture, 'she is *my* little baby; you gave her into *my* charge, and I've taken care of her; and now father's taking her away from me, as he used to try to take *you* away. If only you could come down and speak to me, mother, mother!'

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But next morning broke fair and bright, and the boy was awakened by little Madcap, who ran in, guiltless of offence; and when they had breakfasted together, went out on one of those delightful rambles that included every kennel, piggery, and dovecot upon the estate. The boy missed Digges at every turn; but, as by Mr. Eyre's expressed commands Doune was kept in ignorance of what had lately occurred, he supposed that Josephine and her husband had been sent away for some fault displeasing to his father.

Both man and wife had been kind to the neglected children in their way, and served them honestly, whether from fear of Mr. Eyre's unexpected return, or in part to expiate their secret guilt, might never be known.

Doune's spirits had been steadily rising all the morning; and when, with blooming roses on their cheeks, they returned home a little after one, to find a real schoolboy's dinner ready in the nursery, the boy (who had been dreading lunch with his father) threw off the last of the jealous fears that had tormented him over-night, and, kissing his 'darling, ducksy Madcap,' sat down with her joyfully to their feast.

Nothing had been forgotten that a boy fresh from school could desire, and the nurse smiled as she served him; and Madcap thumped the table approvingly with her spoon when he ate three helpings of pudding.

The woman thought Mr. Eyre was behaving very well in thus giving up the child to her brother, not knowing that he as equally avoided the appearance of jealousy as hitherto he had avoided its reality, regarding it as a despicable vice of the weak—not one that ever attacked the strong. He remained within doors all that day; but none came to disturb him, though afar off he heard the

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children's voices, and even caught a glimpse of them once or twice in the garden.

He recognised the carefulness that housed Madcap safely before the dews fell; but when lights were kindled in the opposite wing, he wrapped himself in his cloak, and went through the village to a spot that he rarely left unvisited for a day.

But others had been before him on this occasion, for a wreath of daisies lay on his wife's grave, and sprigs of sweet-smelling things laid here and there, by a boy's formal hand; and Mr. Eyre thought jealously that his son claimed the older as well as the younger Madcap, though *she* had never for one second placed her children before her husband.

Or so he had believed—did he believe it now, when the living Madcap was shouldering away her mother's image, and his thoughts to-night were less of grief for the lost than jealousy for the living?

His life was emphatically a march onwards. He could die, but he could not stagnate; and stagnation seemed to have come to him to-night, as he told himself that Doune was first, would always be first, in the child's heart. And if so, then, no matter what it cost him, he would leave her, let her cling to Doune, make him her sole idol; for *himself*, no second place in any human heart would he accept.

On his way home he went to Synge Lane, and asked Hester Clarke's friend if she had delivered the message he sent.

The woman replied that she had sent it, but did not expect a reply.

'Then I shall have to go to her,' said Mr. Eyre, as he departed; and at the thought the blood stirred like sap in his veins, for vengeance (though put by during the

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past weeks) had yet to be satisfied, and it would require no great effort to break his home-fetters, and go forth once more on the quest that hitherto had ended but in failure.

But when, long after his dinner-hour, Mr. Eyre reached his study, to find a token of little Madcap's late presence in the shape of a dropped shoe-knot, he picked it up, and half forgave her, though not the faintest intention crossed his mind to return her good-night visit.

Next day was cold and wet, and the children did not stir abroad; but, lest dulness should draw her to him, Mr. Eyre went out for a long ride, that lasted till after dark; and on his return home, knew well enough that no such spasm of recollection as had seized her the night before had reminded her of him to-night.

For a child of three is essentially one-idead, and has no memory (save at odd moments); it goes where love is, but rarely seeks it, so that Mr. Eyre receded into the background, and Doune occupied Madcap's whole thoughts just now.

The man had girded up himself to the fight; but who can fight with a child's whim? Fickle? No more natural phase of Nature can be found than a healthy child; and Nature knows no such word as 'faithfulness,' and in its very elements is opposed to the strained idea that has brought about half the tragedies the world has ever seen.

But as Mr. Eyre's jealousy grew, Doune's slackened, so that the boy in his turn softened towards his father, and prompted those excursions to the other side of the house, from which each day she returned more quickly, with no account to give of herself, save that dad was 'busy.'

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The boy was honourable, and never tried by word or look to set her against her father. There was no bad blood in his veins, and with other treatment might yet grow up the noble 'might have been' of Mr. Eyre's own youth.

But while the children played, and were happy, he was unconsciously preparing his revenge in the invitation he had carelessly given young Lord Lovel, and which he had supplemented by a letter to his mother, the answer to which he received a week after Doune's return.

She would be only too *rejoiced* to send the boy to Mr. Eyre; he always drove her *mad* during the holidays, and no doubt at the Red Hall he would be able to rampage to his heart's content; and her own young babies required all her care, and her health was so indifferent, etc., etc.; and she could never stand more than a week in the country, even for dear Algy and his hunting; and, in conclusion, her son (who seemed to have come in for *nothing* but a house and an empty title, which his father *never expected*) would arrive at his guardian's house the very next day by a certain train that she was particular to mention.

Mr. Eyre smiled grimly as he read the letter, and thought of the writer, a faded beauty, who at thirty-five had taken for a rich second husband a young man of twenty, and hated the boy who reminded her perpetually of the date of her first marriage.

Mr. Eyre ordered little Madcap's late room (opposite his own) to be made ready, and the same day drove over alone to meet Lord Lovel's heir.

Doune heard by chance of the expected arrival, and thought bitterly that it was like his father to give the welcome to a stranger that he refused to his own son.

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No doubt the fellow would be a proud, supercilious ass, who would look down on his own and Madcap's pursuits; and this would be so much the better if he would only stick to Mr. Eyre's own side of the house, and not trouble *them*.

He said nothing to his sister—how could she understand? And he did not know that the two had already met at Lord Lovel's funeral, and become friends beside his grave.

Meanwhile Mr. Eyre received the boy, who came eagerly to meet him, thinking of little Madcap, and rejoiced to escape from the tyranny of holidays in Eaton Square.

As Mr. Eyre looked at the clear-faced lad, sunny-haired, and 'bright of blee,' as all the Lovels were, it struck him for the first time that he and Doune could not be more than a year apart in age, yet how different in looks, bearing, and attractiveness!

Mr. Eyre thought he might have loved such a son as this, as they went back together to the Red Hall, for the boy was fearless of him, and had, moreover, taken a liking weeks ago to the stern-faced man, against whom his mind had not yet been poisoned by scandal.

Doune heard the carriage return, and listened sullenly for a summons to go below; but none came, and Madcap and he had their short evening alone, as usual, until suddenly 'dad' popped into her head, and down she jumped from her high chair to go to him.

Doune wrapped her up with his usual jealous care, and saw her depart in the nurse's arms; then sat down with darkening brows, and the old bitter feelings rising in his heart. As he had felt when his mother died, and before the softening influence of his little sister had come upon him, so he felt to-night as he sat alone, and

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thought of how short his holidays were, and how completely Mr. Eyre would win her away from him in the end.

By a hundred trifles, and without questioning her, the boy had, during the past few days, discovered how close was the bond of sympathy between the pair; how in everything Mr. Eyre had anticipated him, even to teaching her the alphabet; how in every smallest detail of her nursery and dress Mr. Eyre's hand appeared, and was recognised by the little one.

'Dad carries me better than you do;' or, 'Dad tells much *pittier* stories than you does.'

Such expressions would now and then fall from her lips, and it required the exercise of all the boy's powers to keep her beside him, and for an hour together forget the existence of the lonely man who pored over his books in the opposite wing.

Too young to understand the situation, she accepted it with the unhesitating trust of childhood, and trotted from one to the other with a heart brimming over with love for each.

But the servants and outsiders thought the state of things between father and son unnatural, and said there was bad blood between the two, because the boy knew Mr. Eyre had been suspected of the murder of his wife, but was not permitted to know that Digges had tacitly proved himself guilty of the crime.

But here they erred.

Doune had heard nothing and knew nothing; yet those who loved him might well tremble for its effect upon him when such knowledge came.

He was thinking of his mother to-night, when a step sounded without, followed by a chuckle, that announced Madcap. And the boy started up, thinking it was his

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father; but a tall lad brought in the child, who ran to Doune, crying out:

'Doune, Doune! here's that *nice* 'ittle boy me saw at the fooneral!'

The two lads, near of a height, though there was a year between them, offered in appearance a most striking contrast, as for a moment, boy-fashion, they looked askance at each other; then the one held out his hand, and the other took it with an honest enough grip, and without speech or any other preliminaries there was at once a good understanding between them.

'What's 'oo name?' said Madcap, with hands behind her back, and a much-tumbled pianofore fully disclosed.

'Gordon Lovel.'

Doune looked at him earnestly. So this was the new Lord Lovel; and how fondly he remembered the old one, the 'Frank,' who had been his and Dody's playmate, none but he himself knew.

'Come and have a ride on my rocking-'orse,' said little Madcap, pulling at Gordon's hand; and so the two boys were given time in which to take each other's bearings, as the best sort of boys always will, before rushing into a friendship that is no true one, if it do not last a lifetime. Doune had endured his schoolfellows, but never had a real boy-friend; neither had Gordon ever found one completely to his liking, so that before the evening was over, and in spite of Madcap's frivolous interruptions, the two boys had got so good a glimpse into each other's minds as made them part reluctantly, and with eager thoughts of the morrow. The three children breakfasted together, and it was afterwards that Mr. Eyre's unintentional revenge upon little Madcap began.

The boys, entirely taken up with one another, found the three-year-old child in their way; and, though both

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adored her, presently found an excuse to take her back to the house, then rushed away from her laments, and spent their morning gloriously.

For there are so many perils and dangers into which mettlesome boys of eight and nine can get, even in a morning's excursion round a small estate, and so many pursuits through which a baby might not be carried, and how could they have climbed, leaped, and raced with the little one toiling behind them?

And they were happy, as boys *can* be happy—as man, woman, or girl never was nor ever will be; and of all heartsome, healthy sights, commend me to a lad who, in the full flush of his youth and vigour, follows those innocent pursuits that are storing up strength within him against his manhood.

Mr. Eyre had seen the premature return, heard the childish sounds of lament, saw the little figure that ran, with socks down at heel, after the retreating boys, returning shortly with every sign of grief and disorder, and sobbing her heart out as she climbed the steps that led from the garden to her nursery. Surely she would come to him, Mr. Eyre thought; but she did not, and presently he swallowed his pride and went to her, though not even *he* could heal the wound her brother's desertion had inflicted upon her faithful heart. She permitted herself to be consoled at last, and even ran with smiles to meet the faithless ones when they appeared ruddy and hungry in the distance, close on the dinner-hour.

Doune snatched her up, and kissed her fondly; then, seeing his father beyond, felt the colour of his spirits change; but Mr. Eyre demolished a difficulty, and established a right order of things, by including both boys in his inquiries as to how they had amused themselves that morning.

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Doune flushed, and was tongue-tied for awhile; it gave him a new sensation to address the father who had not spoken to him for three years. But he forced out a few words, so that Gordon saw nothing amiss, and, liking both, was struck once more by the extraordinary resemblance between father and son.

But if Mr. Eyre did not hold himself aloof from the children, he never intruded on them.

They could come to him when they pleased, but he never went to them; their meals, their hours, were different, and, having resumed his duties as magistrate, there were days when little Madcap, seeking him for consolation, found none, so that thus early there were thorns in her babyish lot, and she learned to suffer before she understood the meaning of the word.

For that first day in which she found herself neglected had, with variations more or less cheerful, repeated itself during the ensuing forty, so that sometimes Madcap would be carried, first by one boy, then the other, through all sorts of adventures, and anon found herself neglected for some rat-catching or bird-snaring exploit, from which her small presence was rigorously *tabooed*.

But, no matter what might have been their shortcomings to her during the day, of evenings they were her devoted slaves, and would play at every game possible to the whim or intelligence of a three-year-old child.

Hide-and-seek was perhaps the favourite one, and bursts of merriment would often be wafted to Mr. Eyre on the other side of the house, who about this time marked an almanac with the date at which a reply might be expected to the message he had sent Hester Clarke.

For if she would not obey his summons, he had made his mind up that he would go to her immediately.

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And little Madcap? Well, she had disappointed him, as her mother had never done, and he loved her, to be sure, but——

And yet it wanted only the touch of two velvet lips, the love and trust of two gentle arms round his neck, to make the strong man weak as water, and vow to forego vengeance, if only he might hold the first place in the heart of his lost Madcap's daughter. As the holidays drew to a close, the boys were more than ever inseparable, and one day Mr. Eyre asked Doune if he would like to join young Lovel at Eton after Easter, to which Doune replied in eager affirmative, colouring for joy, but too tongue-tied to utter the gratitude he really felt.

But a better feeling had slowly grown up during the past weeks between the two, that Gordon's sunny temper and ways had done much to promote; for his was exactly the right influence for Doune, and came, too, in the very nick of time, and when it was most urgently needed. Nothing morbid could live in the healthy atmosphere Gordon made around him; while for Doune's strength of character and brilliancy of intellect the elder boy had the deepest admiration, so that the bond between them was one of unbroken harmony from the first.

Often they would talk of what they would do when grown up, and, the estates being so close together, not a day passed but the boys went through the Lovel woods, sometimes even entering the house itself, and roaming through its neglected, desolate rooms, invariably ending in a visit to Joe, who sat by the fireside, but would never be able to do any active work again.

He had come out of his fit perfectly clear in mind, save for the one fixed hallucination that it was not his young master who had been buried under the name of Lord Lovel, but some other man who resembled him,

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and whom Mr. Eyre had thought fit to bury thus for some reason of his own.

He never acknowledged Gordon as the heir, but invariably addressed him as Master Lovel, and bade him not grow up idle, or looking to the inheritance, as any day 'little Master Frank' might walk in and claim his own.

The boys humoured him in his fancies, and he liked them both; but best of all he loved little Madcap, who sometimes came with them, and concerning whom the old man had a supernatural belief that she was her mother born over again—that mother who had once been his master's girl-sweetheart, and who had been stolen from him by Mr. Eyre.

So between the old and broken man and the young fresh child a strong and faithful love grew with the years, and by the time she was ten there was not a story of Frank's beauty, bravery, and truth that she had not got by heart; and he had become that perilous, often most disappointing creature upon earth—a child's hero; and for every flower that she laid on her mother's grave, she laid one beside it for Frank.

* * * * * *

The last few days of the holidays passed in perfect bliss to Madcap, as the two boys (blaming themselves for their neglect) took her with them everywhere—carried her over wet places, but in dry ones allowed her to trot like a little dog at their heels, and if she got a tumble or two they were none the wiser, for she did not mind what bumps and bruises she got so long as she might follow them.

Neither of them could make enough of her during this time, and each night the boys went sorer-hearted to bed,

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and dreaded the parting with her more. On the night before they were to start, travelling together as far as town, Doune went to his little sister's cot before she fell asleep, and sat down beside her.

'Madcap, my little ducksy darling,' he said, 'I've not been very kind to you these holidays; but I'll be better next time, and it won't be long' . . . . . he stopped a moment, with that smarting pain in the eye-balls which is a brave boy's way of crying, then went on—'and you'll be a good little girl, and get nurse to write me a letter once every week, telling me how you are, and I'll write to you often—and you must love me always——'

'Oh yes!' said Madcap, 'you and Dad—and Geordie,' she added, as an afterthought.

'Don't you love me better than Dad?' said the boy, his courage giving way, and the question forcing itself out.

'You *and* Dad!' said the child, dancing up and down in her cot. 'Dad and Doony—love 'oo both!' and she kissed him fondly.

He thought to himself bitterly of how often he had neglected her, thus driving her to Mr. Eyre to be consoled; and indeed this fresh boy-love had for the time swept him off his feet, so that one day he actually forgot his usual visit to his mother's picture.

And when the fatal moment of parting came—when Madcap, drowned in woe, was splashing Doune and Geordie impartially with her tears, and throttling them with her kisses, even then the boy could not forgive his father that equal share with himself in his little sister's heart.

'Good-bye, sir,' said Geordie, taking Mr. Eyre's hand warmly; 'and thank you for the brightest, happiest holidays I have ever had in my life.'

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'Come back at Easter,' said Mr. Eyre, who really liked the lad in his way.

'Good-bye, sir,' said Doune, his cold hand barely touching his father's; and if he had not been so tall of limb, and resolute of glance, his independence might have provoked a smile; as it was, Mr. Eyre met him in his own spirit, and in a final storm of sobs from Madcap, the schoolboys departed.

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CHAPTER XI.

'"Does the sun shine with you; and does heaven drop rain upon you?" said a King of Africa, who had just made a noble award to his own loss.

'Alexander answered, "Yes."

'"Then must it be," said the King, "on account of the innocent animals that dwell in your land; for over such men ought no sun to shine, no heaven to rain."'

Gesta Romanorum.

When Mr. Eyre next went to Synge Lane he found Hester Clarke's reply to his message in the form of a sealed letter to himself.

It had neither beginning nor ending, and contained very few words; but these were significant.

Janet Stork was dead, and she herself returning to England immediately. She had heard Mr. Eyre was resolved to seek her out, and most solemnly warned him to desist from any such attempt, *since she could not tell him more than he already knew of*, and, for the sake of both the dead and the living, no power on earth should force her to open her lips to him on the subject.

'*Justice* may yet,' said Mr. Eyre aloud, as he folded the letter. 'Tell her this from me when you write, *that she shall* speak, and I'll have the whole truth from her lips yet before I die.'

And he went out, with a curious feeling that the battle

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was beginning over again, and that the peace of the last few weeks had been but a rest before the coming struggle.

So the clue that had dropped from Frank's dead hand was held safe in Hester's living one, and he would find, and wrest it from her, though it took him a dozen years of search.

She could tell him nothing that he did not know already. Ay, that was true enough, for he knew her guilty of the murder, and to-day was more rooted in his belief of it than ever.

His spirits rose as he walked home, and, pausing at the churchyard, he thought that in time he might even come to forgive Frank, whose mind had no doubt been poisoned against him by the woman's lies.

Within an hour Mr. Eyre had telegraphed to the governor of the convict settlement in which Janet had died, for any information obtainable about the woman who had visited her and been her friend.

Before night the answer came back that nothing was known of Hester Clarke's plans beyond the fact that her destination was England, for which place she had set out some weeks before in a sailing-ship, of which the name was given.

Here was material upon which to work, but inquiry only elicited the fact that Hester Clarke had left the ship at a port half-way home, though the captain did not think that her circumstances warranted the loss of half her passage-money.

He had therefore returned it to her, and was much amazed when, by return of post, he received a cheque from Mr. Eyre, and a request for an immediate interview.

This duly took place at Poplar, the honest, bluff fellow

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refusing the money, but willing to give Mr. Eyre all the information he had.

He said that he had been told she was going home because the friend for whom she had come out to the settlement was dead, and she had been heard to say she wished she had died with her, as she had no friends to return to in her own country.

'And her appearance?' said Mr. Eyre.

'The handsomest creature I ever saw in my life,' said the sailor, with a weather-beaten blush that did not escape the other; 'but with that look on her face——'

'A look of *guilt?*' said Mr. Eyre swiftly.

'Lord bless you, no!' said the honest sailor indignantly;—'she wouldn't hurt a fly; but she looked like one who's seen sorrow, and maybe worse things in her time. I asked her to marry me, sir—and now the murder's out—but she wouldn't, and there's an end on't,' he added, wondering what this stern, dark man might have had to do with her past life, or what with her future.

'You may thank God that she would not,' said Mr. Eyre drily. 'You will be going back before long?'

'This day month.'

'Keep a berth for me,' said Mr. Eyre, 'for I'll go with you.'

'The accommodation's rough, sir,' said the man, feeling a curious unwillingness to set Mr. Eyre on Hester's track.

'What will do for a woman will do for me,' said Mr. Eyre carelessly.

And, having paid for his passage, he entered the day and hour of the ship's sailing in his pocket-book, and, shaking the captain's hand, left him.

'I wish I may be doing her no ill turn,' thought the

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captain (honest and thorough as surely sailors are above all other men); 'but I doubt if he finds her there—she's not the sort of woman to be caught, if she's minded to give anyone the slip.'

But, as it turned out, Mr. Eyre was not one of the half-dozen passengers who sailed in the good ship *Arizona*.

The very hour of his departure he deferred to the last moment, that he might wish little Madcap good-bye in her sleep, and so spare herself, and him, a scene of pain; but at the very moment when, cloaked and gloved, he entered the nursery, he was startled to hear her singing at the top of her voice, the tune abruptly changing to a horrible barking sound that tore his heart-strings as he stood; then saw the child struggling to rise, and terrified, gasping, fighting for breath, seemingly in the act of dying before his eyes.

He tore at the bell, cursing the nurse for her neglect; but, swifter than any bell could travel, the woman, when those shrill clear notes of singing burst upon her ear, had fled downwards to order blankets and boiling water, and was back in the room before the look of agony had died from Mr. Eyre's face, as he sat with the convulsed child in his arms.

'*Croup*, sir,' she said, and whipped a bottle off the mantelshelf, and poured out a teaspoonful; 'the hot water will be here directly,' and she poured the stuff down the child's throat.

But though the hot water came as by magic, and Madcap's stiffened limbs were plunged in it, dose after dose of the ugly brown stuff had to be administered before the gasping struggles for breath grew quieter, and the contorted limbs became still.

'Dad, *what is it?*' she said, looking up at him once,

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as, helpless, he hung above her, his agony greater than hers.

And all his life long he never forgot that piteous voice, the sight of her little terrified face in the midst of the steam and blankets, damp curls clinging to her brow. Surely that other Madcap must see it, and blame him for his neglect of the child during the past weeks. He remembered now that she had never been strong, though she seemed so—the little prematurely-born babe, that no one expected to live; and she had been running wild with the boys, and fretting over their departure; and if Mr. Eyre himself had left an hour earlier, she would have been crying out in her misery for 'Dad,' and there would have been none to answer.

He said to himself then that if she recovered he would never again leave her—revenge might go, but he would care for her as *she* would have done, whose very heart and body seemed to tremble with his as he gazed; and when at last the crisis of the attack was past, and the child lying exhausted, but out of pain, in his arms, the man's stubborn soul died in him, and he recognised the God that had granted the life that He might have forfeited. For this disease by which the child is rudely shaken out of its slumber, and brought face to face with appalling suffering, and often death, is one before which the strongest man, the most skilful surgeon, must shrink; and the sight of the broken nerve, the child's terror of the recurrence of the agony, are, even in the days of recovery, sadder still.

The weak voice, the pallid cheek, the overheated atmosphere of the room, remind the watcher of how precarious is the life that has once been so threatened.

And when Mr. Eyre heard later the fiat of a famous surgeon, that nothing but the most devoted care and

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watching would shield her from constantly recurring attacks of a similar nature, he buried Hester Clarke and vengeance fathoms deep in his memory, and forbade them to rise again until summoned.

Only to-night, as he sat with the child in his arms, it struck him that somewhere he had seen something similar, and in this very room . . . and the child had been his own; but it was dead, and he had come hither as magistrate, with the ministers of justice at his heels, to arrest the woman upon whose knees it lay for the murder of his wife.

Had the inevitable law of nature reproduced itself? was God to bring the sinner's heart to humanity through its nearest and best?

All that night Mr. Eyre watched beside the little steam-enshrouded figure. At daybreak the *Arizona* sailed; and as she parted her cables, her captain rejoiced that she carried one passenger the less than had been booked.

Mr. Eyre himself put ship and man out of his mind, and on the day when he might have reached Hester's landing-place, was wholly engaged in enjoying the frolics of a child who, in the sparkle of a young March day, had recovered some of the brightness that she lost in an illness that, though five weeks old, she had not hitherto been able to forget.

In one bitter short experience Madcap had learned the meaning of the word *death*, and shrank away from it—shrank even from visiting her mother's grave, and knew safety nowhere out of her father's sight.

She had been taken back to her old room opposite his, and not even Doune could have found the heart to oust her from it when, at Easter, he came back to find her languid, half her beauty of rounded outlines gone, and

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threatened daily and hourly with the deadly complaint that had already seized her twice since the attack that had appalled Mr. Eyre.

Perhaps the hearts of father and son merged their bitterness then at her side, and in their common love joined forces to protect her; perhaps jealousy showed as a mean and common thing as they watched over the little frail life that was the all of each; and the first fibre of respect in Doune stirred to his father when, after a long watch, Mr. Eyre laid his hand on the boy's shoulder and bade him go to rest. But first Doune went to his mother, and, light in hand, looked in her eyes for reasons why she should so have loved her husband.

Perhaps the boy found them there, so that he could subordinate himself to her child's happiness, and when, a few days later, Geordie came, Madcap's satisfaction was complete.

No need to tell the boys now to take care of her. Carried over every puddle, and up every hillside, little Madcap daily gained fresh strength and tone, so that the village folks smiled to see 'the master' and the boys go by with her. The black drop of blood between father and son was gone, they said, praying Heaven that when he grew older he might not take the tragedy of his mother's end amiss, and read Mr. Eyre wrongly, as in their secret souls they themselves had done. Some of the women said that in making an idol of the child, he had made a phantom of the mother, and that he was more 'foolish' over the second Madcap than he had been over the first; and this was true in a sense, for while he had felt himself master of his wife's fate, *here* he knew himself helpless, and his love was all the purer that it was so much the less masterful. If outwardly he wore as proud a front, and carried things with as high a hand as

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ever, inwardly he knew himself a changed man, who looked out on life with new eyes, and in whom the very lust for vengeance was for a time extinguished, so that he hardly thought of the *Arizona*, or of how each day his chances of tracing Hester lessened.

About this time Mr. Eyre received a letter that puzzled him, since he could see no good reason why it should be addressed to *him* more than to any other person.

It was his way to read his letters through without first looking at their signature, so that only at the end of this one did he find enlightenment, and then only of a partial kind.

The writer said her son had joined the —th Foot (against her most urgent entreaties) in the thick of the Crimean War, that his name had never appeared among the list of killed or wounded, nor had his effects been forwarded to her; though, on inquiry at the War Office, she elicited the fact that he had returned to England invalided at the close of the war. But home he had never come, and she feared some brain-injury had kept him apart from her, or that he had fallen into bad hands, for he was said to have had a large sum of ready money in his possession when he sailed. The mother went on to say that having seen in a newspaper an allusion to Mr. Eyre's return with the body of the late Lord Lovel, who had joined the regiment about the same time as her son (she was able to fix the date by a letter from her boy), she ventured to write and ask if Mr. Eyre had seen or knew anything of him, the Colonel and more than half the officers being dead, and the remainder now in India.

She added that he was twenty-six years of age, tall, fair, and blue-eyed—her only son, and she a widow. His Christian name was Francis. Mr. Eyre's memory was

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accurate, and he remembered Colonel Lindsay's mentioning young Methuen, and also some odd words that had escaped him in dying; but these he did not think worth repeating to the poor lady when he wrote to tell her that he had no knowledge of her son.

He received a more memorable letter some weeks later, perhaps the longest one that bluff sailor Captain Pye ever wrote.

He said he had stopped two days on his outward passage at the port Mr. Eyre would have visited, and had spent his whole time in making inquiries about Hester Clarke. Several people remembered her landing, as she was unveiled, and her beauty uncommon, and she was seen to enter a food-shop close to the harbour; but from the moment she left it, not the slightest trace of her could be found. Many ships, both homeward and outward bound, touched at the port that day, and the captain could only suppose that she had gone away in one of them. She had effected some change in her dress at the shop (said the woman who kept it), and veiled herself so closely that her features could not be seen.

And the sailor concluded with the hope (meaning no offence) 'that since it was clear the poor soul did not wish to be traced, and had tried to burn her boats behind her, why, to his mind 'twould be only honourable in any man not to set sail in pursuit of her; and he begged to remain Mr. Eyre's faithful servant, Joseph Pye.'

Mr. Eyre wrote a brief reply, in which he thanked him, and said that he still meant to take a sail in the *Arizona* one of these days, and should make it his business to know when Captain Pye's ship was in port. But somehow the 'convenient season' for that sail did not come. As years went by, and gradually little Madcap outgrew

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the fell complaint which had threatened her life so often, she still required all his care; and home-ties, and those connected with his estate, bound him more and more closely to the life that had so fully satisfied him in the days before Hester Clarke came to trouble it.

If now and then a restless thought rose in his mind—if at odd moments the old puzzle rose and confronted him, demanding its solution, he put it by. Perhaps some inward sense told him that this time of peace was but the pause before the final struggle of his storm-tossed life. But the pause was a long one; and the years went by as days to the man who at no period of his life had found a day too long for its work.

And so in the eternal freshness of the 'children's kingdom' Mr. Eyre lived and renewed his youth. So, by slow but sure degrees during these happy, healthy years, the old antagonism between father and son died out; for beside and between them stood Madcap with her love, and a hand in the hand of each.

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BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

'Our present sunsets are as rich in gold
As when the Iliad's music was out-rolled.'

A BOY was singing 'As pants the hart for cooling streams,' and the exquisite voice soared, as it were, to the very gates of heaven, then sank down and down like silver into the depths of a clear well—sank into the very souls of some of those who heard him, and, by some curious association of ideas, caused Mr. Eyre to start violently, and lean forward to gaze at the singer.

Why, this was the very boy whose voice had so enchanted Mrs. Eyre one hot May morning that she had compared it to cool rills of running water that refreshed body and soul as they fell; and Mr. Eyre, who, for a wonder, had accompanied her to church, had laughed, saying she only found the voice uncommon, because in looks the boy happened to be a cherub.

And there stood the boy, cherubic, sweet-voiced, singing the very same words, and looking as if he had never done anything but sing ever since; and yet it was impossible that he should be the *same*. This must be a younger brother. . . With a sudden gesture Mr. Eyre

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brushed his hands across his eyes, then looked around him, much as Rip van Winkle may have done when he wakened from his long dream.

The boys and girls had grown into youths and maidens, the middle-aged folk had become old, and many of the old men and women were missing from their places; the very clergyman had grown white-headed, and the clerk and sexton become bowed with rheumatism and age.

His glance came back to rest on the occupants of his own pew, and again he started, for it seemed to him that his wife stood before him; this was not the child who had drawn him hither each Sunday morning, but his lost Madcap, just as she had looked in the early days of her marriage; no whit older, or sadder, or less lovely than the girl at whom Mr. Eyre now so intently gazed.

The tall handsome lad beside her was Doune, the living image of what his father had been at twenty, and just now so deep in thought that his Prayer-book had, unnoticed, slipped from his hand; but it was on the fourth occupant of the pew that Mr. Eyre's gaze dwelt longest, a frown slowly gathering upon his brow.

The young man who had caused it to gather would scarcely have heeded one of Jove's thunderbolts just then, for his ardent, eager eyes were fixed upon Madcap, who seemed unconscious of his presence, and intent only on her devotions.

There was too much of the lover in the look, thought Mr. Eyre, experiencing that odd sense of repulsion which most fathers feel when the lover comes to woo the young and delicate daughter . . . perhaps some jealousy is at its root; perhaps the father's instinct has its origin in something nobler, and he trembles for the future of the tenderly-nurtured creature whose truest safety is by his side. . .

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'I'll have no boy-and-girl love-making here,' thought Mr. Eyre, looking keenly at Madcap, who caught the glance and half smiled. 'I'm first with her yet,' was the continuation of his thought, as, folding his arms and with gaze that went past her through the open door, he set himself to think of how it was that these twelve years had passed so swiftly that he had taken no count of them till to-day.

Madcap's rearing, and the gradually acquired mastery of Doune, had occupied him a long while; and then, to be sure, there were the perilous years of the two young men to be watched over at school and college, and his own duties as landowner and magistrate to be performed, so that the 'trivial round, the common task' had filled his days; and he had not room even for the episodes of ambition and love that had on two several occasions threatened him. The first came when a neighbour died, and Mr. Eyre was entreated, in the Conservative interest, to stand for the adjoining county; but to such entreaties he turned a deaf ear, not because he felt any outward stain, or inward unfitness for the position, but because his home-ties so closely bound him that ambition offered no charms to him now.

The second episode came in the determined siege of him by the Duke of Marmiton's widow, a beautiful woman, with whom Mr. Eyre had flirted before his marriage, and, as some said, *since;* but he was never in any danger from her, though her courtship lasted many years; and, since he would not run away, it was openly wondered that he did not marry her, if only to free himself from her persecutions.

For the rest, he had without an effort won back that position which he had once so entirely lost, and, in the eyes of his world, stood forth a man who had entirely

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lived down the one terrible, far-reaching sin of his youth, that in its consequences had so nearly wrecked his life.

He neither sought society nor eschewed it; but if found at home when his neighbours called, met them with his old fascination of manner and habit of intellectual supremacy over other folk's minds.

One must live under the world's eye to be accounted cleanly; and it is part of the uncharitableness of human nature that one is suspected of wrong-doing if one refuses to be subjected to the microscope. To be loved by one's neighbours one must lay both heart and life bare for their dissection, and our very vices will be viewed with affectionate toleration if only we will permit our friends to take a bird's-eye view of their progress and range.

But Mr. Eyre appeared to meditate no new surprises in the way of wrong-doing, and men and women alike found him greatly changed, and for the better; his face, too, wore a look of peace that made him appear years younger than when his wife died.

But to-day the old grim lines in his face showed and deepened; in his stubborn heart the old fierce question rose like a spectre, and demanded its reply. The time of peace was over, the moment for uprising at hand; and the ice that during the past years had frozen hard over one hidden volcano in his heart shivered at a breath, when in that hour of awakening he realized how, amidst all his duties, *she* had been forgotten. Out yonder by Frank's side she lay; he could see the tombs from where he sat, as he had seen them Sunday after Sunday —ay, as he had been *content* to see them, he thought, as with a passionate gesture he rose and left the church.

Madcap had seen the light flash to his eye, the colour to his cheek—marked the throe that seized him; and

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her eyes followed him anxiously to where he stood, looking down on her mother's grave, immovable as a man carved out of stone.

Presently he stooped and plucked a daisy, placing it beside another that his pocket-book held; but with the second he laid away a vow.

Ay; but once before, and by her scarce cold clay, he had sworn an oath to her and forgotten it; he had been content to eat, drink, and sleep while yet her blood cried out unavenged from the earth; he had been happy in his home-life, while *she*, who had no share in it, lay yonder neglected and alone, while, secure from pursuit, her murderer walked the earth.

He had been supine, had loved his ease (for as such showed to him now the finest, best endeavour he had made in his life); but now he was *awake*, and to the bitter end would pursue that scheme so abruptly broken off by his little daughter's first illness.

She was strong enough now, and, besides (here a wry smile twisted Mr. Eyre's lips), there were others to love her if anything happened to himself, for fathers have no such hold on their daughters' hearts after marriage, as their mothers are declared in the old distich to possess. Then there was Doune; the boy's splendid training at his father's hands had left few doubts as to his moral future; it was only from an intellectual standpoint that his father had fears for him, and dreaded that abuse of application to his studies which usually resulted in sleepless hours, and latterly in one or two curiously prolonged attacks of sleep-walking.

But this tendency he would outgrow, and as to those issues involved in Doune's future knowledge of the manner of his mother's death, Mr. Eyre never troubled himself with conjectures concerning them; the boy knew

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him—ay, and loved him, as the father was very well aware.

He did not look back to the day when his life of peace was rudely assailed by influences from without, and over which he had no control; if he had clung to his peace then, he did not cling to it now, and from *within* the fatal impulse came that set him once more marching forward to meet his fate.

Before he left his wife's grave, and long before that homily misnamed a sermon was half over, he had chalked out his plans, arranged his campaign; and, on reaching home, consulted a *Shipping Gazette*, in which, as by a miracle, he found the very information he most desired.

His daughter's eyes still followed him as he left the grave; but Doune had scarcely seemed to notice his father's exit, while Gordon thought that the flush on her cheeks, the unwonted restlessness of her movements, were due rather to her thoughts than to Mr. Eyre's abrupt departure.

It was the young fellow's last day here; to-morrow he would return with Doune to keep his last term at Oxford, and then would come home to settle down at the Towers for good.

'Don't 'ee clean up or alter over-much, Master Geordie,' had said Job to him—'you'll have to give an account of it all to the master one of these days; and the less spent, the less there'll be to pay back.'

For the old man still lingered on, refusing to die till his young master's return, when, as he said, he would be only too glad to lay down his life and depart in peace.

Gordon never contradicted him, even when Job persisted that he couldn't somehow *see* Madcap the younger there as the young man's wife.

But Gordon saw her there clearly enough, and meant

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to turn the old place upside down before he took her home to it, which would be somewhere about next year, he supposed, for then she would be full sixteen winters old.

Her mother had been engaged to his cousin Frank when as young; for, of course, Gordon knew the whole story, and thought the accident extraordinary that had kept Doune ignorant of the truth. For himself, his knowledge affected no whit his love and respect for his guardian; to *him* Mr. Eyre would be always the first, best, noblest man living, only he wished that his little sweetheart had not loved her father so well, since in that father alone he found a rival in her heart.

There were no others to fear, the county just then being signally deficient in either young or middle-aged men equal to the calibre of those to whom she had been bred; and if a young fool named Busby came riding often to the Red Hall, why, no doubt he would be finally despatched with some such flea in his ear as Mr. Eyre had always been able to muster on the departure of the fool's father, who, having kept a stone in his pocket seven years, had long ago turned it, convinced that the time for its use would come yet.

No lovers showed on the horizon; but, with one of those presages of love or fear that often we call supernatural, the young fellow longed for some sign or promise of love from her before he left on the morrow.

He would be gone such a little while, and surely there could be no hurry; yet, as Madcap's eyes travelled past him down that gradually diminishing perspective of aisle and churchyard that ended in her mother's grave, he said to himself that he would within the hour put his fate to the touch, without the leave of Mr. Eyre or any other.

As the preacher's dull, booming voice sounded faintly

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from afar, Gordon (unconsciously following Mr. Eyre's steps) went through a kind of retrospect of the past twelve years, in which the foremost figure was always—if with a hundred variations—Madcap.

If at three years he had slighted while he adored her, at six she had assumed airs of sovereignty to which he had submitted, while each succeeding year gave her fresh superiority over the lads who grew so fast, and must pass through all those awkward stages of youth through which the girl herself danced and played without the loss of a single grace or charm.

She was at heart a romp, as her mother had been before her, yet could walk sedately, and *say* her prayers instead of repeating them; had been known to go rat-catching (though she never went twice), bird's-nesting, and often jumped a five-barred gate when no one was looking; took first-class honours in the fine art of snow-balling, yet might be discovered in wet weather walking on pattens with soup in her hands for some sick villager; and withal was her father's close companion, and 'thorough,' as only a girl who has associated with the best sort of English man and boy ever is.

Tricksy as a brook that laughs over pebbles, but anon sinks into silence between high banks, with a depth of character that ran hand in hand with those wild madcap spirits from which her mother had taken her name; as clear-brained as she was simple, as innocent as she was strong, Gordon's mind had never held but one idea of womanhood from his birth; and Madcap filled it.

His love exactly matched that pure, boyish, ardent one that his dead cousin, Lord Lovel, had felt for Madcap's mother when, as mere boy and girl, the two had become engaged, and, but for Mr. Eyre stepping in between them, might have been alive and happy in each other yet.

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Sixteen and eighteen, these had been the ages of the young pair; and now Gordon was nearly of age, and the younger Madcap fifteen and a half; and why might he not speak, and secure his happiness before some other man appeared to dull or destroy his hopes?

In her education had been included no forward thoughts of men, and no self-consciousness marred that virginal look which we sometimes see in very young girls, who from their birth have been kept far out of the reach even of a chance smirch of evil, and whose souls have been left as God made them, not moulded to the lives of those to whom their training has been entrusted.

Such a look of purity is compatible with every charm, roguish or saintly, that a woman ought to possess; and to his heart's core Gordon reverenced its preciousness, as, all ablaze with the first passionate love of early manhood, he longed for the sermon to be over, so that he might speak.

She was dressed in white, as it was Mr. Eyre's whim that she always should be, and wore a large hat softened and veiled with snowy feathers, caught back in such a way that the whole tender, velvety brow and curling chestnut hair showed out as from an exquisite frame. A muslin kerchief that left the rounded, slender throat bare was knotted at her breast; and, for the rest, her gown was simply made, and reached to her ankles, while long white silk mittens that reached to her elbows were tied with narrow ribbons; and black shoes, with silk stockings inside, shod the most beautiful little foot in the county.

But when the benediction was spoken, and the young pair paced down the churchyard walk together, while the villagers looked after them and smiled irrepressibly, as people will at the sight of love, youth, and beauty,

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all in full bloom together, Gordon's heart sank, so that in silence they went through the little gate, and took the path that led homeward through Lord Lovel's woods.

Softly as those who are shod in velvet the two went; and this silence was so unlike his roguish, saucy Madcap that, trembling, he thought she must know what was on his lips, and that—oh, blessed and unsuspected sign of love!—she was shy as himself.

The young May breezes stole ruffling round their lips and cheeks, for here might always be found freshness and shade; but even the beauty of her beloved woods could not rejoice the girl's heart that day; and when presently Gordon stooped down to look into her averted face, he saw that tears were running down her cheeks.

'*Madcap!*' he cried, moved to the soul by these signs of grief that must surely be for himself, 'don't cry; I shall soon be back. This is May the 10th, and I shall be back the first week in July—come home *for good.*'

'It's not you,' said Madcap ungratefully, as she dried her eyes; 'it's—it's *Doune!*'

The young lover recoiled, and the words of love died on his lips.

'Can't you *see* that he is killing himself with overwork?' said the girl, unheeding Gordon's looks; 'he has been up night after night at his books, yet he rises at the same hour as we do, and he gives himself *no* rest. And now he is going back unrefreshed to harder work still, and he will take to walking in his sleep, and perhaps fall off a chimney and be killed—my dear, darling Doune!'

'He has never gone farther than the door of his chambers,' said Gordon, in unsympathetic tones; 'the bolts always wake him up. Besides, *I'm* there to see that he comes to no harm.'

'And yet you are going to *leave* him,' said Madcap,

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looking at him with eyes in which reproach drowned itself in tears; 'and who is going to pick him up, pray, if he falls out of a window? or—or telegraph to get me up in time?'

'You know, Madcap,' said the young fellow coldly, 'that your father arranged for me to leave college one term before Doune did; but if you are so anxious to get rid of me for six months longer, why, I will make you happy.'

'*Do*,' she said, her face clearing up; 'and you and he shall come back together, and we will all be as happy—as happy as can be!'

'Shall we?' said Gordon, rather wistfully. 'I don't know. I'm not given to presentiments; but somehow I feel as if this were the last of our happy days, and that trouble is closing around us.'

The girl started as though a chill breath had pierced the warm air around, and she grew a little pale as she said:

'I felt like that just now; but it is only that you are both going away to-morrow, and so we have got out of spirits, and superstitious. I even thought there was something amiss with father when he went out, and stayed so long by mother's grave; have you seen any signs of restlessness in him lately?' she added eagerly.

Now this was the last straw on Geordie's back. To be questioned about an elderly gentleman's bodily signs when you are bursting with your first declaration of love is surely beyond the endurance of any proper man or boy of spirit living.

'He is getting old,' said Gordon brusquely, and turning his back on her.

'Old?' repeated the girl, in a startled tone. 'Dear old

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dad is growing *old?* How dare you say such a thing, or turn your back upon me, sir!' she added, stamping her foot (and here I regret to confess that she invariably stamped twice, where once would have satisfied her mother), while a flood of angry crimson rushed to her cheeks.

'He *is* getting old,' said the young fellow, turning round to face her, with eyes angry as her own; 'and of course he has whims, and can't sleep at nights, and feels the heat in church. But is all this any reason, pray, why you should forget *I* am going away, as well as Doune, to-morrow?'

'Poor Geordie!' she said; and he felt that he hated his name, and wished it had been any other. 'But *you* will come back; and you are so young; and you say he is getting old . . . . why, there is no real work for which he is not fitter and stronger than you or Doune!'

'Thank you,' said Gordon, feeling the insult to his youth keenly; 'perhaps when Doune and I are elderly men, there may be one or two things that we can do to your satisfaction.'

'Elderly men are so much more interesting than young ones,' said the girl, stooping to pluck a sorrel-leaf, and grimacing as she ate it; 'but what is the matter with you this morning? You look as cross as two sticks, and usually you are so good-tempered——'

'Good-tempered!' exclaimed the sorely tried young man. 'Why, to be a good-tempered man is to be the butt—the fool of one's company——'

'Yes, but you are only a boy,' said Madcap, slipping her hand through his arm as she spoke; 'how dreadful it will be when we are really grown up!' and she sighed, as at the thought of departing joys.

'I don't suppose any of us will *grow* much more,' said

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Gordon gloomily, and feeling that his wooing was going from bad to worse, 'though I *have* heard of girls growing after they were sixteen.'

'But I'm only fifteen and a half, Geordie,' said the girl almost piteously, as she looked up into his clouded face, and speaking as one who laments to lose something precious; 'don't forget that every year I grow older, father gets older too—as you were cruel enough to remind me just now!'

'And youth is the time in which to enjoy yourself, and *I* am growing older too,' said Gordon, with a ruthlessness that only the pain of love could justify. 'Are we to be children *always*, because Mr. Eyre is nearly a century ahead of us?'

Madcap drew her hand away, and, with something of her father's odd sense of awakening, looked at the young man before her.

'You are grown up, I suppose,' she said, after a minute's dispassionate survey of him, 'and you have a moustache —I never noticed it before—and Doune has none; but he is a year younger than you, and, after all, I don't think one would suit him!'

He answered nothing; he was dumb with helpless anger and misery as he walked beside her.

Her instinct, usually so fine, was at fault here; for, preoccupied by thoughts of brother and father, she never dreamed of the turmoil going forward in the breast of her companion, and who in her mind, and despite that unexpected discovery of his moustache, was still a boy.

'Let us sit down,' she said, as one suddenly fatigued; and Gordon felt that the sequel to his chapter of accidents had come, when he found himself enthroned on moss, in all the agony of those go-to-meeting clothes that he abhorred.

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His tall hat, at least, he might abolish without indecorum, and this he sent flying with a vigour that nearly wrecked it against a neighbouring tree, and brought Madcap to a more attentive consideration of him than she had hitherto vouchsafed.

His good looks, though remarkable in themselves, were of that Saxon order that no one dreams of calling uncommon, and he had always suffered in Madcap's eyes from being placed in juxtaposition with Doune, whose keen, dark, brilliant beauty was entirely peculiar to the males of his family, and as proverbial in the country as it was shared by no other save his father and himself.

'Are you all bewitched together?' she said; 'first father, then Doune, now you?'

'Yes, I am bewitched,' he said, not looking at her, and thinking that no man of mettle or sense ever *sat* down to a declaration of love, least of all with such scant encouragement as was his.

The love that meets one trembling, the timid look, the blush, the involuntary movement; if she had shown any one of those pretty flags of encouragement, so easy to be supplemented by the lover with more ardent signs still, how easy it would have been to speak, how difficult to tell afterwards whether he or she had said or looked the fatal words that carried them over the Rubicon!

But to chaff him; to call him a boy at nearly one-and-twenty; to congratulate him on a moustache, as if it were a new toy or a pop-gun; to suggest sitting down when he would have found it a better sign in her if she had run away from him—were not all these things sufficient to anger even one of the gentle, sweet-blooded Lovels?

When he had despatched his gloves after his hat he

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felt better, but still looked cross enough to amaze Madcap, who had not the clue to his thoughts, and who now capped all her other misdeeds by bursting into a peal of laughter.

'Why don't you send your coat after the rest?' she said; 'I've seen you often enough in your shirt-sleeves—though *I* don't find the day hot at all; I am perfectly cool.'

'You need not tell me that,' said the young man, who had folded his arms on his breast, and now looked as miserable as he had before looked angry; 'you are always cool about everything that concerns *me*, but you put yourself into a fever if your father or Doune gets a finger-ache.'

'Why, Geordie,' she said, opening her eyes very wide, 'are you *jealous?*'

'My name is Gordon,' said the young fellow crossly. 'Whoever nick-named me that detestable *Geordie* ought to be shot. I may be only a boy, but I'll be hanged if I answer to that name again!'

'Shall I call you Lord Lovel?' she said, in a gentle voice that made him turn swiftly to look at her; but, alas!—

'*In her fair cheeks two pits do lie,*'

and these pits were filled up and as brimming over with laughter as the rest of her face, and, while ravishing, served only to enrage him.

'I'll tell you what it is, Madcap,' he said; 'if you go on laughing at me this way, I'll box your ears—or—kiss you.'

'It would not be for the first time,' said Madcap placidly, and with a shameless disregard of her situation; 'kissing me, I mean. But as to the other, why,

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that's one of my prerogatives; for you know I've boxed *your* ears almost ever since I was born.'

'Yes—that's just it,' said the young man bitterly. 'I was fool enough to *let you;* whereas, if I had given you a lot of trouble, and kept you in order, you would think twice as much of me now. As it is, Doune and your father make a double-first' (he laughed angrily at his own bad joke), 'and I'm not in it.'

'Yes, you are,' she said, but rather coldly, for she was offended at the rebellion of her slave; 'but, of course, they are *first*. And—your stupid joke reminds me——I wanted to ask you about Doune's first-class honours.'

'Hang first-class honours!' said Gordon, letting go the last remnant of his manners.

'By all means, Lord Lovel,' said Madcap, red with anger. 'To be sure, with you it is a case of sour grapes, for you never had a chance of winning any; your chief laurels were earned in cricket and boating——'

'And a very good job, too,' cut in Gordon ruthlessly. 'If I had beeswaxed my nose to my books as Doune did, and not taken him down the river for a breather now and then, he would be in an asylum by now.'

'Oh, there's no disgrace in rowing in the Oxford eight!' said Madcap loftily, 'especially if you can't do anything else'—here Gordon bounced on his mossy seat, and felt that a few more minutes of this would finish him—'but then you kept rats in your rooms, and——'

'Uncommonly useful they were,' said Gordon heartlessly. 'I trained them to run up Doune's legs, and they sent him off to bed every night a good three hours before he would otherwise have gone.'

'And you were had up before the dons——'

'Old asses!' interpolated Gordon, his manners growing worse and worse.

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'And were nearly rusticated,' said Madcap, swallowing a smile, and with her voice as stern as she could make it; 'but that was for some disgraceful piece of business that you got into all by yourself, for Doune and father could tell me nothing about it!'

The young fellow blushed angrily, but sat his ground; he knew that his youth had passed honourably beyond that of most men, and saw no reason why he should not make a loyal husband to the girl who so serenely flouted him.

'That's my business!' he said shortly; 'but I'm getting tired of being a mere caretaker to Doune——'

'*A caretaker?*' said Madcap, sitting erect, and with flashing eyes; 'is he not strong and clever enough to take care of himself?'

'Is he?' said Gordon, still in that hard tone. 'Well, I gave up the Guards to remain with him at Oxford——'

'I thought it was because you wished to settle down at the Towers,' said Madcap, whose colour had begun to sink before the energy of the young man, so that in ten minutes he had gained that place in her esteem which twenty-one years of honest, unselfish service had not bought him.

'I could have settled down here all the same,' said Gordon. 'I should have enjoyed a few years in the army down to the very ground. I was never cut out for pursuits such as Doune loves; for, as you say, I have no brains—never had any.'

Madcap said nothing, but looked at him with new eyes, as, with averted head, he went on speaking.

'I am talking like a sweep,' he said, 'but you have provoked me into it; and whatever I have done for Doune, I take no credit for it—it was not for him.' He turned and looked at her; and through all his anger

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and trouble, the yearning, eager look in his eyes showed like a rift of blue sky through clouds, and touched Madcap to the heart.

'We have never quarrelled before, Geordie, much,' she said, with a little tremble of the mouth—

'Like ony hinny pear'—

whose lovely corners now drooped as sadly as usually they curled up in mischief; 'and you are going away to-morrow . . . . and I do not want you to go—angry.'

His face changed as one may see a field of grain that is colourless beneath a stormy sky pass suddenly into a flood of gold—one knows not how, one knows not whence—but light is there . . . . and so, in a human soul, love will work the self-same miracle; and Madcap drew back startled at the transfiguration her words had wrought in the young fellow's face.

'Madcap,' he cried, forgetting to think of whether he were sitting or standing (though, in point of fact, he was kneeling), 'I have been a brute to you—but I was so jealous and so miserable—and you'll forgive me, dear, won't you?' he said humbly, as he took the slender, mittened hand, Prayer-book and all, and kissed it passionately.

Now, if he had kept up his hard-heartedness two minutes longer, perhaps if he had boxed her ears soundly, as he had threatened, she might have taken him as master for once and all 'under good greenwood-tree;' for her spirit had responded to his manliness, and next to her father and Doune she had always loved him best—and often the second-best love ends by becoming the first.

But that kiss made him once more her slave, and the lesson of love was as yet beyond her comprehension, since there was no inward teaching to enable her to

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learn it . . . . and so Gordon got a stone for bread when she said, with her hand still in his:

'You know—I love you, and I cannot bear for you to go away; and to-morrow this time I shall be crying over you both——'

'Both!' He could have let go her hand, but that he was ashamed of his late outbreak, and wanted to atone for it. And there were tears in her eyes, rarely enough permitted by her three faithful henchmen. Yet he risked all as he said:

'Are you crying for Doune, or for *me?*'

She looked at him with the tears in her eyes, trembling but still unfallen on her cheeks, and perhaps (though so young) some glimmering of love came to her then, and unwittingly she stood on its brink, perhaps—for who shall fix to a moment the turn of the tide, the decline of a sunset, or the meridian of summer?—she might have taken the golden moment that led on to happiness and safety, but that some need from within, some lack from without, stayed her.

Yet both were so young, and both so beautiful, so inclined to each other, in years, tastes, and every natural law of affinity, that love between them might be as natural and lovely as it only is when like pairs with like; yet Gordon felt that the moment was missed and the opportunity gone, as she said, holding up her face to him like a scolded child who seeks to make amends:

'You'll kiss me, Geordie, and be "friends"?'

Perhaps the sanctity of her youth sank into him then . . . perhaps the thought of certain blemishes in his life shamed him . . . but as they leaned their two young heads together, curiously alike, as a beautiful youth and a maiden often are, he only kissed her cheek.

Was he a fool? I trow not.

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CHAPTER II.

'Judgment and sentiment, each in their turn replacing one another, give good counsel.'

'You have taken a long while to walk home,' said Mr. Eyre, as Madcap entered his study, and came quickly to his side; 'had Gordon some entertaining story to tell you to-day?'

He held her from him as he spoke, and looked at her keenly; but her colour neither rose nor fell as she said:

'Oh no, father! but he was out of sorts, and miserable, and we quarrelled; but it's all right now—we've kissed and made friends.'

Mr. Eyre looked at the girl's cheek and lips, as though he expected to find a stain on them, then said:

'Pray, what did you quarrel about?'

'He thought I cared only for you and Doune,' she said, hanging her head a little; 'but I *do* love him—next to you two, better than anyone in the world.'

'So we *are* first?' said Mr. Eyre.

'Yes,' she said, looking at him wistfully and tenderly, for with Madcap familiarity had never bred contempt in her for her father—'you and Doune, Doune and you.'

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'Poor Gordon!' said Mr. Eyre, as, summoned from the past, a girl's face rose up before him, unkindled, with no light of love on it — yet a betrothed wife, and presumably beyond the reach of any other man's love.

He sighed as he looked, and felt her arms round his neck. After all, would not his own Madcap have been happier with Frank than she had ever been with *him*, and should he now seek to part two young souls who in time might learn to conjugate the verb 'to love,' as well as if they had begun with that passion which almost invariably ends in disaster?

'Child!' he said abruptly, 'I am going away.'

She lifted her head from his shoulder, and drew back, a startled look in her eyes.

'Going away, dad?' she said, her voice chilled by that curious foreboding that had dwelt in her mind all day; 'are you going up with the boys?'

'No,' he said; 'farther than that—at the outside, I may be away two months.'

Two months! and save for that one flying visit to Poplar, he had not slept out of his bed a single night these twelve years; and tears were in Madcap's eyes as she said:

'Where are you going, father?'

Here was a question he had not anticipated; but his answer came without a pause.

'I am going on business—business connected with your mother.'

'Is it so urgent?' she said, looking anxiously in his face; 'can anything do her any good now, or make her *happier* than she is?'

For to the girl, who knew only that her mother had died in childbirth, that mother's lot had seemed a

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beautiful one; for does not the Virgin Mary convey straight to heaven all those who die in 'strong travailing'?

'Yes, it is urgent enough,' he said, not heeding her last question; 'and yet it has been waiting for my attention these twelve years. I have been supine in my dotage, but I am awake now; and you'll be happy enough, child, while I'm away.'

He looked at her, thinking that to leave her thus was a fainter pang than that which a mere momentary absence from her mother used to cost him; for, as once he had merged the older in the younger Madcap, so now the child was merged in the mother.

'Who was it that said "a woman of forty is only beautiful to those who have loved her in her youth"?' he said, getting up, and pacing restlessly the room; 'and she would be verging towards that by now—yet more lovely than you are, or ever will be.'

He looked searchingly at the girl, who had paled but did not shrink before this new and unsuspected phase of his character, then said:

'Does not the fashion change once in twelve years? For see here'—he unlocked a drawer, and brought out a full-length miniature—'here is her very dress, her hat, just as she wore them to church on the first Sunday after our marriage; and you are wearing their very doubles' (he held the portrait out as she advanced to look). 'But the portrait itself is a wretched daub, and you'll never get any real idea of her from that, or her picture. You must look in the glass if you want to see her image.'

'Am I so like her, father?' said the girl, looking at him steadfastly, and subduing each sign of alarm at the excitability of manner visible in the usually cold, proud man.

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'Yes,' he said, looking at her fixedly, 'you are so like her that you have *reminded* me of her. Good God! to think she has lain out yonder, cold and forgotten—forgotten through twelve years!'

'No!' said the girl firmly; 'she has never been forgotten. Not a day has passed but I have laid flowers above her; and when Doune is at home we go together.'

'But I laid none,' said Mr. Eyre; 'though I have plucked a daisy or two; and her blood cries out to me.'

'It is at rest,' said Madcap softly; 'and though we shall go to her, she will not return to us; and there are the living to consider as well as the dead.'

'You will do well enough without me, child,' said Mr. Eyre grimly: 'the book of youth is more suitable to your reading than that of age, and to-day I've woke up to the fact that I am near sixty, and that whatever work I have to do, I must do quickly.'

'You are *not* old,' she said, with tears in her eyes, as she remembered Gordon's words; 'you are a dear, beautiful, darling dad, as you always were, and ever will be'—and with a sob she reached up her arm, and caught him as he would have passed her.

'No, no, child,' he said; 'I am old—I have looked at myself in the glass, and there are two lifetimes at least between you and me. There was only one between me and your mother, so to-day she seems nearer than you are. And you will be happy enough with the boys—*she* was never as happy with hers, as with me.'

He was walking quickly to and fro as he spoke, startling Madcap with the signs of excitement that pointed surely to brain-mischief; but he caught the fear in her eyes as it rose, and said:

'I'm sane enough, child—but to wake out of a sleep, a

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sleep of twelve years, to find so much left undone that *ought* to have been done——'

'But have you not done much?' she said, her young voice unconsciously stern; 'have you not made your children happy, and would *she* have wished more?'

'So I have made you happy, Madcap,' he said, looking at her; 'and whatever sins may be on my shoulders, I can tell her *that* when I see her. And now we'll go to lunch, and then I have business to do, though it's Sunday; and after, we'll go for a walk instead of to church, and I'll tell you all your duties, as you will be the young Squire while I'm away.'

His eyes were brilliant, he was unlike his usual self as he led her to the dining-room, where the young men and lunch had long awaited them.

'He is handsomer than Doune,' was Gordon's thought, as the pair came in; and he understood better that infatuation of Mrs. Eyre for her husband, which had hitherto seemed to him a fable.

For he was so old, and she so young. How could they have loved each other as Gordon and the younger Madcap could have loved, had she been willing?

'So I have kept you waiting,' said Mr. Eyre, as he sat down at the head of the table, with Madcap on his right; 'and yet I am hungry, too;' and he carved for them all with vigour, and even helped himself with a liberal hand.

'So you are going away to-morrow, boys,' he said presently. 'Well, I am going too; but farther than you.'

'Where are you going, father?' said Doune, looking up astonished, while Gordon was wondering what made Madcap so pale and unlike herself.

'I am going on business connected with your mother, and perhaps I may travel with you as far as town.'

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'And what will Madcap do all alone?' said Doune, with some dissatisfaction in his voice. 'Couldn't you put off your travels, sir, till I am at home again to take care of my sister?'

'Not I,' said Mr. Eyre. 'I've put them off these twelve years, and they'll wait no longer. And the child will be happy enough.' He turned to look at her. 'She shall be my Squire—a madcap Squire—transact all my business, answer my letters——'

'Then you expect to be gone some time, father?' interrupted Doune.

'Two months, perhaps—more or less,' said Mr. Eyre.

'Then I think, sir, with all respect to you, that Madcap should have some one with her during so long and perhaps uncertain an absence as yours promises to be.'

'Oh! there's Nan,' said Mr. Eyre carelessly; 'the child couldn't have a better sheep-dog, and I'll have no half-educated women or people of that sort, to spoil her mind and manners. And of course she'll see no company —not even young Busby,' he added, with rather a grim look at Gordon, and beneath which the young fellow coloured.

'So that's settled,' said Mr. Eyre; 'but you boys are drinking nothing'—and he told the butler to bring up some rare old burgundy that they were fond of, and when it came, he would have Madcap drink a little of it too; but by some mischance she spilt the wine on its way to her lips, so that the drops ran down over her white gown like blood.

Mr. Eyre started violently as he saw the trifling occurrence. In that very chair her mother had sat, and he had given her a glass of that very same old wine, and she had spilled it on her white gown; and afterwards he had

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thought of it as an omen of evil, though he had been in such high spirits as to be 'fey' that night.

Was everything in league to remind him of *her* that day? Why, the very dessert was her favourite one, and there was even a little dish of those sweetmeats with which he used to stuff her pocket for the nursery, and Gordon was sitting where Frank used to sit, and curiously like him; and the very butler who was serving them was the one who had waited on the elder Madcap, and who, having left the Red Hall with the other servants after his young mistress's death, had been traced out by Mr. Eyre on his return, and offered his old place.

He glanced round the room—all was just as when she lived, save that the oak furniture and wainscoting were a shade blacker with age, the crimson of the hangings a little faded; and through the open window he saw in the distance the little village, that lay as though in a hollow of the horseshoe formed by the Lovel woods. It was a room that fairly represented the rest of the house, one in which generations of Eyres had lived and died, neither adding to nor taking away much, restoring where it was necessary, but as nearly as possible replacing worn-out things with others of the same pattern; so that, mellowed by age and kept bright by happy voices, it had been to both Madcaps that hallowed and beautiful thing, a 'home.'

Each loved life in the open air, and knew Nature's every mood by heart; each was simple in her tastes, caring nothing for gauds or jewels, but bred to those natural ones that strew the earth at our every step, shining in new colours day by day, and for ever and ever renewing themselves to us so long as we have eyes to see, and heart to seek them.

'Why, this is a Quakers' meeting,' said Mr. Eyre,

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rousing himself as the butler softly closed the door, shaking his gray head at the signs of mischief he saw in his master. 'Madcap, little maid, will you have some sweets?' and he half filled her plate as he spoke.

But the sweets lay untouched; and when he looked at her, it was to find her struggling desperately against tears, her second foolish outburst that day.

'Why, Madcap!' he said; then, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, and all his old tenderness for her, went to her side, and put his arms round her.

'Dad,' she said, her voice steady, though tears rolled down her cheeks, '*Dad*—don't go away; trouble will come of it, and we are all so happy. *Don't go.*'

'This hot day has upset you,' said Mr. Eyre; 'but you'll be better by-and-by,' he added, as Gordon, unable to endure the sight of her tears, rose and went to the window. 'Come, we'll fetch your hat and go out; it will be cool enough now in the shade;' and he led her out of the room.

Neither of the young men spoke when left alone. Gordon was feeling more than ever that there was trouble in the air; and yet, early that morning, he had been able to see no cloud on the horizon save his inevitable departure for two months on the morrow.

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CHAPTER III.

'And ye maun shape it, knifeless, sheerless,
(Blaw, blaw, blaw winds, blaw);
And he maun sew it, needle, threadless,
(And the wind has blawn my plaid awa').'

And pray what could be the 'business' connected with Mr. Eyre's late wife that took him abroad so suddenly? Was not all business closed to the young wife and mother who lay sound asleep out yonder, side by side with her first sweetheart, and each with 'a red rose on his breast'?

Doune was the first to stir, and frowned as he went out: he had long ago mastered his old jealousy, and the 'black drop of original sin' that the angels are said to have squeezed out of Mohammed's heart when he was an infant, had gradually dried up in the brother's breast. But he felt that here was something amiss, something that he was shut out from, and with a boy's fierce prejudices regarding the safety of the women of his family, he blamed his father for the carelessness that would leave the girl unguarded for two whole months.

But for those laurels that he had worked night and day to win, that he knew were now within his grasp, he would have stayed to watch over her; and dear as was ambition to the ardent, brilliant youth, he was within an

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ace of throwing up everything to stay at home and guard his sister.

He went to his father later, and told him this.

'Whom do you fear?' said Mr. Eyre coldly; 'the servants of this house are all old and tried; in the village there is not one soul that would harm her. And as for lovers'—he paused—'the *idea's* horrible, but *must* be entertained one of these days, and of course she'll marry Gordon.'

'You would not oppose it, sir?' said Doune, drawing a deep breath, as one relieved of intense anxiety.

'No,' said Mr. Eyre, with an effort; 'but not for some years—it is like cutting off an arm or a leg, but necessary, I suppose, and better fathers than I have lived through it.'

Later in the day came Gordon, who said, without prefix of any sort:

'I love your daughter, sir; when I come home in July, may I ask her if she will marry me?'

'You have not asked her yet—there has been no foolish love-making between you?' said Mr. Eyre, looking at him keenly.

'No,' said Gordon, looking down; 'she is so young . . . it would be a kind of sacrilege; and yet'—he raised his head boldly—'I would have asked her this morning if she had not laughed at me so, and I saw that as yet she does not know what love means.'

'And do you?' said Mr. Eyre, seeing his wife's first lover over again in the young man who stood before him.

'Did you wait till you were forty before you found out what love meant, sir?' said Gordon steadily. 'To my mind, youth is the time in which to love and be happy—and a man's first love is his purest and best.'

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'You have never tried a last one,' said Mr. Eyre carelessly, 'so you can't tell. But if she *must* marry (though I see no reason for it) she may as well marry you as anybody else. I don't see any rivals ahead,' he added, with a sort of grimace; 'as you say, she is young, and wooers have not yet discovered what a treasure the Red Hall contains; but, mind you, there shall be no engagement till she is sixteen, and no marriage till a year or two after *that*. By-the-way, all this is without *her* consent—are you sure of it? To be sure, she cried to-day, and perhaps that was for you—though I took her tears to myself——'

'I can do no more than love her, and tell you so; the rest lies with her,' said Gordon, with true manliness, as he went away, leaving Mr. Eyre to that 'business' which his coming had disturbed.

Although the Sabbath evening, he was deep in those matters that a prudent and sensible man sets in order before setting out on a journey, not in itself dangerous, but from which it is possible he may not return.

On the table before him lay the reply to the telegram that a servant had that afternoon ridden ten miles to despatch, waiting for the answer, that came more quickly than was expected. It was dated from the 'Saucy Poll,' Poplar, and announced the sailing of the *Arizona* at daybreak on Tuesday morning, a berth being retained for Mr. Eyre, according to his telegram just received.

When the heaviest part of his correspondence and work was done, Mr. Eyre, catching sight of that open sheet, felt a sudden conviction of the uselessness of this voyage, and for a moment (common-sense having returned to him in the monotony of his work) wavered in his determination to go.

For what trace, after twelve years, could he hope to

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find of Hester Clarke in that port at which she had touched but for a few brief hours?

He had wakened too late, and the clue was lost; yet, *being* awake, he must be up and doing, and better seek her vainly than not seek at all. If the woman lived, he would leave no stone unturned to find her, and perhaps his cessation of pursuit had made her confident of safety, so that there might be the less difficulty in finding her. If she were dead—and at the thought Mr. Eyre's heart contracted with that bleak rage which had moved him when he looked down on his dead friend—then he had still his home and the younger Madcap to welcome him.

Though her mother so entirely filled his thoughts that day, the old, tender, yearning love for his daughter had returned to him during the past few hours.

For he was but an egoist yet, could he but have known it—could only love what loved him *first* and alone; and he knew that not Doune's approaching departure, not Gordon's wretchedness at leaving her, had moved Madcap's heart to that passion of tears which the thought of 'Dad's' absence had unloosed.

After all, why not let revenge go, the present remain, make for his young daughter, at least, a life that should be

'One grand, sweet song'? . . .

Vengeance could not make *her* sleep the sounder; and to have the whole terrible story raked up—to see himself in his children's eyes as a thing to break their hearts with shame, why, surely any sane man might have turned his back on the thought and the distempered visions of the day, and gone out into the summer evening, thanking God for the peace that was yet within his keeping.

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But Mr. Eyre was not then in his right mind; one of those crises of excitement that sometimes at long, sometimes at short intervals invariably overtook each male of his race, had seized him now, and he must work out whatsoever destiny he carved to himself in those feverish moments.

He turned back to his table, his cheque-book, his accounts, and instruction to his agent, working at them till far into the night, and long after the rest of the household slept.

At daybreak he rose, and, extinguishing the lights, went to his daughter's room, where he found her fast asleep, with tears on her cheeks, that had also fallen on one of the young, tender arms that pillowed her head.

Where had he seen something like this before? he thought, as he stood looking at her. Presently he remembered . . . . . it had been at the White Lodge, the late Duke of Marmiton's house, where for his own selfish whim he had kept his wife, refusing her leave to go home to see her children, and she had gone to sleep with tears on her cheeks, with Dody's gift of sweetbriar in her hand, and next morning had risen early, when, riding upon an ass, and escorted by Lord Lovel, she had set out on the journey that had made the scandal of the county.

Yet Mr. Eyre had no more ruth now than then; he was still 'fey,' a man who must e'en dree out his weird to its bitterest conclusion, and upon whom praise and blame were alike wasted, unless the responsive impulse came from within.

This morning it was absent—it was as his lost Madcap that he felt the pang of parting with his daughter, and stooped his lips to the lock of bright hair that lay loose on the pillow.

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By eight o'clock he was in the saddle to ride to the County Asylum (seven miles distant), and by nine he had reached it.

'There is no change in her,' said the governor, bowing low to his visitor; 'she just plays with the diamonds from morning till night; but not a word of sense does she speak, though we've watched her closely these twelve years.'

'Perhaps the sight of the woman Clarke might rouse her,' said Mr. Eyre. 'I'm going to look for her—though that's between ourselves.'

The governor bowed again, but with a certain hesitation of manner.

'I think,' he said, 'there is not a doubt Digges committed the murder, egged on by the woman Josephine for the sake of the jewels. But in some way Hester Clarke is mixed up with it, and the most wonderful thing in maniacs is the way they will keep lock and key on some private brain-cell that we can't pick, however cunningly we try; and that there's some such knowledge she's watching over, you can tell by her very glance.'

'Take me to her,' said Mr. Eyre abruptly, and followed his guide into a room where, clean, happy, smiling, Josephine Digges advanced to meet them.

She had grown stout in the midst of the plenty for which Mr. Eyre had paid. She was happy in the diamonds that sparkled on her round neck and arms, and grasped a bit of tissue-paper with which she had been rubbing them. But at sight of Mr. Eyre a shade passed over her feature, and she stood still as one on guard.

'What did you see Hester do?' he said, his eyes fixed on hers. 'Did Hester kill her, or did Digges?'

The woman listened attentively, a gleam of reason seeming to start across her face.

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'Hester stole up the ladder,' she said, as one who accidentally remembers a forgotten fact; 'but it was all over before then——' and she laughed vacantly, and sat down on the ground to begin polishing anew one of her diamond bracelets.

'What did she see?' said Mr. Eyre, loosing his hold on her, as her gaze wandered away.

'Murder!' said the woman, not looking up, though she shivered. 'But diamonds are beautiful!' And she kissed the stones passionately as the two men left the room.

'Have her watched more closely than ever,' said Mr. Eyre, as he departed. '"Murder will out," sooner or later.'

'But this is "out" long ago, sir,' said the man earnestly, as he looked at Mr. Eyre's haggard face, won to him in spite of all previous convictions; 'and the murderer sleeps safe enough (thanks to you) in Lovel churchyard, if you would but think so.'

'Perhaps,' said Mr. Eyre indifferently, as he rode away at a hard gallop to pay another visit before he left home that day.

He reached Synge Lane not much before ten, and was met by the same silent, stubbornly civil woman, who seemed not to have aged by a hair during the past twelve years.

'Where is Hester Clarke?' he said, as he alighted.

'God knows,' said the woman, with an accent of truth that Mr. Eyre recognised, 'for I don't.'

'She has never written you since she enclosed to you a letter for me?' he said.

'Never!' said the woman; 'it strikes me once by whiles that she's dead. Have you been doing anything to her?' she added suddenly.

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'Not I,' said Mr. Eyre; 'in fact, I'd forgotten her; but now I *want* her—and found she shall be, if she's alive.'

'Perhaps she'd better be dead than found living by some,' said the woman bitterly. 'I'd rather think she was dead, than tormented of devils.'

'Am I the devil in this case?' said Mr. Eyre, not waiting for her answer, as, certain that she knew nothing, he went out and rode away, having barely time to make his final home arrangements and catch the morning train to town.

He found Madcap bright and busy, seeing to a hundred comforts for himself that he had overlooked; while the 'boys,' as she still called them, came in for a large share of her attention.

If she packed up a stray tear or two with her father's shirts, Doune's books, and Gordon's cricket flannels, who should count them but herself, when, brave and smiling, yet desolate in the midst of this breaking of her household gods, she stood at the door to see the departure of all she loved on earth?

Her tears had been got over yesterday; to-day she was used to sorrow, and kissed two of them without a sob, her father coming last of all.

'Good-bye, Gordon,' she said, and kissed him first, on the cheek, with her arm half-lifted to his shoulder.

'Good-bye, Doune,' she said, and kissed him on the lips, with her arms about him.

But to her father she clung, and kissed his neck only, in an agony of grief that knew no consolation.

Yet her arms released him first; it was *her* impulse that despatched him when, for ever and ever, Mr. Eyre left peace and happiness behind him as he drove away from the Red Hall.

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CHAPTER IV.

'The Muse, nae poet ever fand her,
Till by himsel' he learned to wander
Beside some trotting burn's meander,
An' no think 't lang.'

MADCAP had trotted after her own especial burn, within the house and out of it, for a whole week all by 'hersel',' and she emphatically found the way 'lang.'

She loved the sound of her own voice, and did not always listen to that of the 'trotting burn's;' but who could talk all day long, pray, to an old butler, or an old woman who was always at her needle? and might not the very flowers pall on you, if for ever and ever they nodded, but did not speak?

Even the woods had grown monotonous, she thought, as she turned her back on the Red Hall one morning, about a week after her father's departure, bound as she was on an errand that did not raise her spirits, for it was to Job, who had failed visibly during the last few weeks, and was now sinking slowly out of life, to the last clinging firmly to the belief that God would not permit him to die till he had seen his 'salvation.'

The word stood to him for his 'little Master Frank,' but his faith was long in proving; and though Madcap knew how impossible was the chance of Frank Lovel's

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return, she did not strive to reason the old man out of his fancy, but long ago had fallen into his whim of talking of his master as if he were alive.

'He'll be getting to look a bit older now,' Job had said to her a few days before this, her last sorrowful visit; 'he must be nigh upon thirty-nine now—quite grown up. But he's just as beautiful as ever, bless you! it's his *heart* that makes his face shine so bright that he's better than any sun. I *know* he'll come,' added the old man; 'but if he should come a bit late, when I'm past knowing about it, will you tell him, Miss Madcap, that I waited for him up to the last minute? And don't let them shut the front door. There's no thieves hereabouts, and I've kept it on the jar for him these twelve years; and I wouldn't like him to come home, and find his own door shut against him. You'll mind all this, Miss Madcap, and be particular about the door?'

'Yes,' she said gently, and sat reading to him for a while, and long after he seemed to have sunk into a doze; but as she rose to go, he opened his eyes and looked at her earnestly.

'There's something I want to tell you,' he said in a whisper, 'something I've never told a living soul till to-day; and wouldn't tell now, if I didn't know the time's so short. When my little Master Frank comes back, ask him to show you the inside of his right hand. If there's a diamond-shaped scar in the fleshy part of the thumb, it's *him;* if the mark isn't there, then it's not Master Frank, but an impostor—though the other was a case of mistaken identity, and p'raps your father really believed he was burying the right man.'

'The mark was not on his hand?' said Madcap, a little startled at Job's words.

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'It was not there,' said the old man doggedly. 'First and last I wouldn't and *couldn't* believe the coffin held Master Frank; and I got the lid off, and there he *seemed* to be—the face was his face, the hair, height, even expression just his, and my heart broke as I wished him a last good-bye. But when I kissed his hand, I lifted it, and something moved me to look at its inside, and the mark that he got when he cut it well-nigh to pieces as a lad was *gone*.'

'Why did you not tell my father?' said Madcap, wondering if the old man supposed himself to be speaking the truth, or really spoke it.

Job turned aside that she might not see the look of hatred that Mr. Eyre's name always brought to his face; but when Madcap left, he blessed her with trembling lips, and looked wistfully after her as she went.

'Little master would be no older now than Mr. Eyre was when he married her mother,' thought Job, who had secretly woven a romance about the only two creatures he loved on earth, and who felt death as hard at eighty, and himself as prematurely cut off, as if he had been a lad of twenty-one.

And the girl would miss him keenly, more than ever now, she thought, as, with a little basket on her arm, she paused before plunging into the glare of the cowslip meadow that divided her from the Lovel woods, and in which, as the nightingale's song ceased, those million pretty heads had begun to wither. She could not bear to see the oxlips paling, the timid spring flowers thrust out of their places by that gay, insolent army that ever waits upon early summer, and with the hot breath of mid-May spreads royally through the land; for, like her mother, she valued more a scentless dog-violet than the choicest rose, and a cluster of primroses than the proudest

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plume of garden laylocks that ever tossed itself in suit of white or lilac.

Long ago the pale armies of anemones had escaped, trembling on their hair-stalks, from the velvet-gloved fingers of the tree-roots into the recesses of the woods; long ago the yellow mist of daffodils had ceased to make her heart ache for longing at their beauty; the white streak of the cuckoo-flower had fled away with the cuckoo's song, and the blue carpet of hyacinths had withered, and lost its beauty as in a single night.

For the may-trees were all a-bloom, from whitest white to purest coral, from coral to pink, and from pink to blaze of deepest crimson, so that Madcap's eyes ached as she looked at them that morning, and she longed to reach the cool shadow and silent glades of her adored woods.

She thought she knew them by heart, but those wild inaccessible haunts, where formerly the deer couched unmolested, where curious flowers grew (born of the shade), where you might walk a mile or more without once seeing a glimmer of the sky overhead, were not easily learned; for seven miles of wood may make a kingdom.

To Madcap these glades were a joy, an endless delight, a place in which she might wander as one who stands lonely on the seashore, and think out some of those perplexing questions that will rise in a young girl's mind, and that not even a mother or a father knows always how to answer.

She sighed, and could have wept, as she stood on the other side of the cowslip meadow; for she felt starved of human voices, human company, missed the strong male influence that had hitherto swayed her life, longed to hear the firm step, the beloved voice, to feel once

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more the all-dominant sense of safety that the shelter of Mr. Eyre's strong arm had hitherto afforded her.

Had he not been a little selfish? she thought, with the first shadow of blame she had ever cast on that worshipped man; might he not have found *some one* who could have talked with her, without, as he said, spoiling her manners, and ruining her mind?

To be sure she had her books, and he had marked her out a course of studies that might astonish a fashionable 'blue'; but books were *not* people; and Madcap the younger was one of those people who love laughter, a joke, innocent fooling of all kinds, and was such good company that long ago the 'boys' had found it far more delightful to them than their own.

Never before had her father and Doune been absent together, and then there was Gordon—poor Gordon! always overlooked because he was unselfish, and never got into rages; if only he were living at the Towers at that very moment! thought Madcap, as at last she took the plunge into the cowslip meadow, but too depressed to run across it, as she had done only last week.

Long ago a gate had been fixed in the hedge that connected the Lovel and Eyre estates; but the sun was in her eyes, and perhaps a tear as well; and she saw nothing beyond her as she came through the long meadow grass, stooping here and there to pluck a faded cowslip, and laying them one by one in her basket above the cordial that the butler had put up for Job.

Some one who stood on the other side of the gate, and saw her still afar off, started back with a low, fierce cry, more of fear than pain; then, like one blinded, dashed his hands before his eyes, trembling as in mortal fear, for he thought that he had suddenly gone mad.

He did not stir as those silent steps approached him,

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did not look up when, though he heard them not, he knew them near . . . so had his lost sweetheart looked and moved, so had she carried her basket, and plucked a bell-cup here and there; and *she* had been dead these many years, and it was her phantom that came lightly over the cowslips' heads, perchance remembering that once before she had met him thus, and she must meet him once again, in the one cool chamber of a madman's brain?

Madcap's eyes were flooded with the sun, and she saw nothing as she pushed the gate back, and ran quickly into the wood, when the sight of him startled her, for he seemed almost old, ill, perhaps in trouble, for why was he hiding his face thus?

'I beg your pardon,' she said gently, and it was the voice of his dead sweetheart, and struck to his very heart; 'but are you ill—in trouble—can I help you?'

He tore his hands away then, and looked at her, timidly touched a fold of her dress, a lock of bright hair that lay on her shoulder, all as one who doubts the evidence of his senses; then said, as one who struggles still against it, 'They call you—they call you—'

'Madcap,' she said simply, and seeing some terrible story written in the haggard face at which she gazed; 'I am called after my mother, Madcap Eyre.'

'But she had no daughter,' said the stranger, growing paler with each word he spoke; 'she had but two boys —and a little puny infant that died soon after its birth.'

'No—I lived,' said the girl, drawing a little nearer to him as she saw that he staggered, and seemed about to fall; 'father thought I had died too . . . were you a friend of father's?'

But with a groan and sigh he had fallen sideways to the ground, and lay with closed eyes, and no movement

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of any kind, so that for the moment she thought he was dead; then, kneeling beside him, felt for his heart, and knew that he had only fainted.

In the cowslip meadow a brook ran, and the girl sped to it like an arrow, and flew back as swiftly, her straw hat half filled with water, no more than the other half having leaked out.

But in her short absence he came to himself, and muttered:

'*His* child, and she loves him'—then swooned away as if at the horror of the thought.

He was longer in coming out of that second faint than the first, and the girl grew pale as she bathed his brows in vain; then, luckily, thought of the cordial, and, lifting his head on one arm, poured a quantity down his throat.

But worn and old and weary as he looked to her young eyes, as one who has suffered much, and with the seam of an old sabre-cut disfiguring one bronzed cheek, he yet seemed to Madcap the goodliest man, next to her father, that her eyes had ever lit on—a man who might be a hero, if the lines of his face spoke truth.

Soon he opened his eyes and looked at her, at the pale young face so near his own, felt the trembling of the slender arm that supported the weight of his head, and, by a great effort, stumbled to his feet, and spoke.

'Pray forgive me,' he said; 'I never did such a thing before in my life—but I think my old wound must have reopened; and I had not tasted anything for twenty-four hours, I was in such haste to get to Job.'

'To Job?' she said, and started and looked at him eagerly, a wild improbable thought darting through her brain; then glanced swiftly at his right hand, which was gloved.

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'Are you *Frank?*' she said, trembling and paling as he had seen her mother under strong emotion; 'and you have come back to him *at last*—and just in time?'

'My Christian name is Frank,' he said, buckling on his sword to the stiffest fight (and he had fought many, both within and without) into which he had ever plunged. 'I was a brother officer of Lord Lovel; we joined about the same time, and afterwards fought side by side at Sevastopol.'

'So you knew him?' she said, looking earnestly at the man before her; 'was he not good, noble—a hero in his life as in his death?'

'No hero,' he said; 'only a man who tried to do his duty.'

'He died like one,' said Madcap, turning away from him, 'and he could do no more . . . but, somehow—somehow I always clung to a wild, forlorn hope that he would come back.'

'Why did you think that?' said the stranger abruptly; 'was not Frank Lovel buried sound and deep by your father? Do the dead ever rise after fourteen years' sleep?'

'Do they not rise again?' she said, trembling, she knew not why; 'did you not mistake me just now for my mother, while I mistook you for *him?*'

'And if they rose,' he said sadly, 'would it be for their own happiness or ours? Would they not quickly wish themselves back whence they had departed?'

'No,' she said, as she stood before him, slim and tall, in her white gown, amidst the dancing shadows; and he wondered if anything on earth could be as lovely as a very young, unconscious girl, spoiled by no tricks of coquetry, and fearless as a child . . . 'Job and I would

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have welcomed him back, if he had come to us straight from the dead. And still for *us*—

'"He haunts his native land
As an immortal youth; his hand
Guides every plough;
He sits beside each ingle-nook;
His voice is in each singing brook,
Each rustling bough."'

'Do his people remember him so well?' said the stranger, in a startled voice; 'yet he lived among them so short a time——'

'But he died to their honour,' cried the girl swiftly; 'go to his grave on Sunday, and see how old and young lay their twigs and flowers above him—and on week-days Doune and I remember him.'

'Doune is your brother?'

'Yes,' she said proudly, 'and just like father—as everybody says I am just like mother. How could we have better copies? And Doune remembers when father and Lord Lovel were great friends, and our mother loved him too.'

'Do you ever think of her?' he said, as he leaned against the gate, struggling with his weakness.

'I think of her always,' said the girl softly; 'now that I am growing older, I *want* her . . . but she is happy in the Holy Mary's arms; and she was happy all her life long till she died.'

He looked at her eagerly. So she knew nothing—as her mother had been saved a knowledge of the truth, so now was her daughter; ay, but for ever?

'You are faint and weary,' said Madcap anxiously; 'and I cannot ask you to come to the Red Hall, because father forbade my asking anyone there in his absence.'

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'Yes—I know Mr. Eyre is away,' he said mechanically. 'He sailed in the *Arizona*. Will he be gone long?'

'About two months, or perhaps longer,' she said; then took his hand, and, leading him to the nearest tree, begged of him to be seated at its foot.

'You can lean your back to the bole,' she said; 'and here's the cordial'—she looked the slyest little rogue as she popped the basket down beside him—'you may drink it all if you like—if it's not too much for you; and you'll promise not to *stir*, not even if I don't come back for hours?'

Laughter was flying in and out of her eyes, mischief filled her every dimple, and danced to the colour on her cheek; here was the living image of his lost sweetheart when bent on a frolic, or some bit of fun that she meant to keep all to herself for the present.

He covered his eyes with his hand as if the sun oppressed them, though he was in coolest shadow; but when he looked up she was gone.

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CHAPTER V.

'Sew me for shroud round face and name,
God's banner of the oriflamme.'

'SAUNDERS,' said Madcap, rushing into the butler's pantry, and nearly upsetting its portly occupant, 'I want a meat-pasty and bread, and a knife and fork, and a bottle of wine—not too heady, because of the cordial—and a dinner-napkin; and you're to give it all to me this *minute*, or perhaps he'll die!'

'Yes, Miss Madcap,' said the butler, used to these assaults on the larder and cellar, and supposing she was bent on one of those deeds of charity that made her the idol of the village; and in less than five minutes she was out of the house and flying along the path she had followed so listlessly an hour ago.

What made her so happy? what had sent her spirits up with a bound? Just the mere delight of having some one to speak to, or the happiness of being able to minister to one in pain?

She had not been gone twenty minutes in all, yet when she pushed open the gate she saw that he had either again fainted or fallen asleep.

She sat down at a little distance, looking at him earnestly, and in such wise that she learned his face by heart, and never forgot it; so that years after, with no

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portrait or chance resemblance in any other face to remind her of him, she could recall each line and feature in it, and perhaps unconsciously enshrined him in that heart as a hero, and from then to her dying day thought of him as no other.

And this man had fought by Frank's side; he had known and loved her mother, had come to Job when he was dying—and clearly at some trouble to himself—so that surely he was no stranger, the girl thought, as she sat and watched him, then said to herself that he might have been fair once, before time darkened his hair, and his skin became bronzed by tropical suns; for he had blue eyes, and his brown beard was flecked here and there with gold, and his hands were as white as the narrow line between his brows and closely cropped hair.

Perchance in his sleep some of his lost youth and beauty came back to him, as he lay with one arm thrown behind his head and the other stretched relaxed on the turf; but somehow Madcap never thought of him as middle-aged again . . . . In some curious way he had taken the place of Frank, who in even middle age must needs be beautiful.

Presently he opened his eyes and met that lovely, intent gaze. Springing to his feet like a soldier whom sleep has surprised while on guard, his startled eyes came back to Madcap and the food spread out on the grass beside her.

'What an ungrateful brute you must think me!' he said, kneeling down on the grass beside her; 'and you have gone all that way in this blazing heat for me, while *I* have been sound asleep—doing nothing.'

'You have rested yourself,' she said, nodding, 'and that is the best of all. And now for the pasty!' and she cut a slice and laid it on the plate, for which she had for-

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gotten to ask Saunders; 'and here's the bread; and —oh, you must sit down; you can't eat on your knees.'

'No,' he said, without stirring; 'but I can't eat—and don't ask me why,' he added, looking wretched as her bright face fell, 'for I can't tell you.'

'Is it because it is father's bread and wine that you won't touch it?' said Madcap, her busy hands falling to her sides, and looking like a child ready to cry for disappointment at losing a feast; 'besides, you drank the cordial——'

'You poured it down my throat,' he said ruefully; 'but——'

'What has father done to you that you should hate him?' she said, standing up and looking indignantly at him, as he too rose; 'he who never wronged anyone in his life—my dear, darling old Dad!'

'Good God!' ejaculated the stranger, not as one who spoke blasphemously, but as if the words were wrung out of him by a thought of horror.

'And why should I not?' she said, looking with wonder at his averted face, and stamping her little foot with anger; 'is he not the best, kindest, noblest father a child ever had? You cannot know him very well, or you must be a stranger to Lovel, since every soul in it knows something of the goodness of Mr. Eyre!'

He drew a deep breath, then said:

'Is he kind to Doune? The boy used to be fond of Frank Lovel.'

'How could father be anything else?' she said, the anger of her glance faltering as it fell on the face to which the former worn and weary look had come back; 'and of course Doune remembers Lord Lovel—who ever forgot him? So young, so beautiful, so brave!'

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'I never thought anything of his looks,' said the stranger, as one suddenly out of patience at her praises. 'I wish to Heaven he could come to life for five minutes just to show you what a really commonplace fellow he was! and as to his duty, why, other men did theirs every whit as well as he did his.'

'You are jealous of him,' said Madcap, vexed at this ungenerousness in the man before her. 'All men were envious of him,' she said; 'but now that he is dead, you might forgive him.'

'I hate all that rubbish about heroes,' he said, still cross. 'Now, if this man had lived, he would probably be a grave, middle-aged man, devoted to his estate, possibly grown stout, and a little bald.'

'He *couldn't*,' said Madcap indignantly. 'Oh! I had no idea men were so mean about one another; and if he *were* middle-aged, why, you are nearly that, are you not? And father is more—yet neither of you are stout and stupid.'

She paused to consider him, and caught a faint smile beneath his moustache, that was a real blink of sunshine.

'On the contrary, you are both just right.'

'And do I seem so old to you?' he said, with a curious note of pain in his voice, that startled her, and almost made her forget how keenly he had just disappointed her.

'Oh no!' she said, shaking her bright head. 'I prefer grown-up people to young ones. Only the other day I told Gordon I *wished* he were not so young.'

'Who is Gordon?'

'Gordon is Lord Lovel.'

'He is a good fellow?' said the stranger eagerly. 'You like him very much?'

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'Oh yes!' she said. 'I *love* him—next to Doune and father.'

'And he loves you?'

'Yes; more than he does Doune and father, I think' (she sighed); 'and that makes him jealous. But he'll be better when he's grown up,' she added sagely.

He passed his hand before his lips to hide a smile.

'But you are only a little schoolgirl yourself,' he said gravely.

'I never went to school,' she said, rather proudly. 'Father taught me everything—all that I know.'

The stranger shivered, as though suddenly a-cold; and being a keen observer, she thought of the pasty, and stooped for the basket with which she had originally started.

'I am going to Job now,' she said; then coloured a little, as one who suddenly grows shy; for to succour an entire stranger was one thing, but to take leave of him with a little anger was another.

'Do not go,' he said gently, 'because—because it is too late.'

'He is dead!' said Madcap, standing perfectly still, and looking at him with eyes in which slowly, slowly rose tears as from crystal wells; 'and I never wished him good-bye . . . they did not send to me . . . did he ask for me?' she added, as her tears fell on the cowslip-basket on her arm; 'did he talk of his little Master Frank as he went?'

'He died happy,' said the man beside her; 'and he did not ask for his master, but it must have been of you he spoke just before the last, though I thought he rambled, and meant your mother.'

'And were you such an old friend of his?' she said wistfully, the unwiped-away tears still on her cheeks—

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'did you go to him by accident, or because you knew that he was ill?'

'I knew him long ago,' he said. 'I have waited years for an opportunity to come and see him'—he spoke slowly, haltingly—'and when I was able, I came. The hall-door was open; a woman was sound asleep behind it; I did not wake her, but looked for Job until I found him. He was lying quite conscious, and with his eyes fixed on the door' . . . the stranger's voice trembled, and he turned aside . . . 'and at midnight he died.'

'Oh, Job!' said the girl, with one slender arm drawn across her eyes, and the tears falling below on to the flowers—'*Job!* . . . my dear old friend, and to wait so long, and then to hear *almost* a stranger's step sound . . . for of course he thought it was Frank . . . did he say anything when he died?'

'Yes,' said the stranger, slowly and reluctantly; 'he said, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for I have seen Thy salvation."'

'Then he took you for Frank,' cried the girl. 'Oh, thank God for that—that he died happy! Heaven itself must have put the thought into your heart to visit him last night. I am going to him now,' she added gently; 'I shall know by one look at his face if he thought he had found his master.'

She quitted the stranger so quickly that he could hardly have overtaken her had he followed; but he displayed no such intention, and, with torture in his heart, paced to and fro, with only one fixed resolve—that she should not find him here on her return, nor would he ever willingly look upon her face again.

Meanwhile, Madcap had found Job lying on his white bed, wearing that last, most spotless dress a human being ever wears, as his spirit perchance has fairer

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habitation *now* than it had on earth. She knew that Job's hallucination had lasted to the end—launching him happy on that cold, perilous journey that—now long, now short—is the only certain one to which each living soul is born.

He lay with face all transfigured with the joy that had winged his 'passing,' his lips firm and triumphant as one who has sung his *Nunc Dimittis* in the fruition of perfect faith; and Madcap could not grieve for him, as, having gazed awhile, and kissed his brow, she stole softly away.

The woman who had taken care of Job and the house for years past was waiting for her as she went out.

'I hope, Miss Madcap,' she said, curtseying, 'you'll not be blaming me; but about ten o'clock last night Job got main restless, and would have it that I should set the hall door ajar, and sit down beside it if I was afeared of thieves. He can't abide a strange face near him, and wouldn't let me get a help in from the village; and I didn't reckon the end to be so near, and that's the truth. I left him quite comfortable and listening-like, with his eyes fixed to the door; and then I sat down. But I was tired, Miss Madcap, and dropped asleep, never waking up till it was morning, and a shameful woman I am to stand up to you and say it;' and the honest soul wiped away a tear.

'And then?' said Madcap quickly.

'Then I ran to Job, and he was lying so peaceful I knew he was dead; and beside him was a gentleman, and, oh! Miss Madcap,' said the woman sadly, 'my heart gave a great jump, for, thinks I, p'r'aps this is Master Frank come back, and the old man was right after all; but when the gentleman looked round, I saw he was a

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stranger—nobody I'd ever set eyes on in the forty years I've lived in this parish.'

'And you knew Lord Lovel well by sight?' said the girl.

'Ay, all the village knew him,' said the woman; 'but p'r'aps Job being dazed-like, and hearing him come in, thought 'twas his master. God grant 'twas so!' and she sighed as she dried her eyes. 'The gentleman spoke to me very kind-like, said he'd been an old friend of Job's, and knew the place, and he'd like to take a bit look round, while I was making Job tidy. He wouldn't touch breakfast, and went out soon; but I couldn't send up to you, Miss Madcap, because nobody came in from the village, and I wouldn't leave Job. And now he's happy—but I miss the poor soul. It's like losing the care of a child—and a body's arms can't get along without it for a bit at the first; but p'raps I'll get used to it bime-by.'

'If the stranger comes back presently, try and persuade him to eat something, for, as you say, he has had no breakfast,' said Madcap; 'and *he* must be buried properly, Martha, and father will pay for it when he comes back.'

'Eh, but there was no love lost between them,' said the woman; 'and Job left a bit of money with me for that—he was proud in his way, and the Lovels never let him want for nothing—did Job.'

Martha's words struck disagreeably on the girl's ears. Here was the second time to-day a doubt had been implied of the father whom all men delighted to honour, and the colour flew to her cheek, as, without bidding the woman farewell, she turned away.

'Ah! poor soul,' said the woman softly, as she looked after her, 'she little knows, and, please God, she never may—he's just her idol, and 'twould break her heart to

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know what's past and gone, and how her mother died. But I reckon God A'mighty 'ud never allow that.'

Madcap's heart was sad within her as she went, but no instinct said trouble was at hand—that Mr. Eyre's restlessness meant mischief; while as to those doubts of him, she cast them behind her back, and clung to him all the more closely in spirit—her brilliant, good, tender father.

He had been both parents in one until very lately, when she had got a new insight all at once into her mother's pictured face, and had woke—not gradually, but at a bound—to the irreparable loss to her that the mother was.

The girl was thinking of her now, as she went along the familiar way that ended in the cowslip-field: would not her mother have taught her what to say, and what to leave unsaid, to the first stranger who had crossed Madcap the younger's path, yet who, oddly enough, was *her* friend?

Yet had she not been unkind to this weary man, whose age might, perhaps, excuse her freedoms of speech; but, on the other hand, was she not wronging her father by any kindness to one who hated him so much that he would not touch his bread? Distance had restored the true proportion of things to her clear mind; but, unless with an abnormal woman (which Heaven forbid!), the *heart* is apt to step in at odd moments, and upset the mental universe, so that though men have died and run out of their wits for women, no woman's name has ever shone before the world as a great thinker, discoverer, poet, painter, or writer, or has not been beaten on all points of intellect by one of the opposite sex.

And, to be sure, Mr. Eyre had discouraged the study of mathematics in his daughter, ridiculing the idea of

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Locke, that mathematics made people not so much mathematicians as reasonable creatures, but according to his intellectual lights (which burned brightly) had made her what her mother might have been, had that mother possessed the daughter's brain.

For the strong man had found a hundred wants, unsuspected in his wife, supplemented in his daughter, since that tougher fibre of himself (despite the outward contrast of their looks) had waxed stronger as the years grew, so that on intellectual grounds they met as happily as on common ones, and the acute vigour, the keen vision of childhood, often shed a new light on the page which Mr. Eyre expounded.

But strength of character did not hinder Mr. Eyre's daughter from running when she got within sight of the cowslip-gate, and saw the stranger leaning across it—fainting again, no doubt, and all through his own obstinacy.

But he was not ill in body, only as sick at heart as a man may be, who sees the spring-time of his youth renewed, yet may not taste it, may not even pause to gaze at it, but must turn his back on the exquisite miracle, and live in the graying shadows of a lonely middle-age, that holds no love, yet is for ever restless beneath the throbbing, burning memory of a 'might have been.'

Lightly as they fell, he heard the girl's fleet steps approach him, but did not turn till a gentle hand touched his arm, and an anxious voice said:

'Are you ill?'

Might a man have tears in his eyes, yet neither look, nor be, unmanly? Perhaps Madcap got an insight into the real beauty of grief when nobly and unshrinkingly borne; perhaps she got a glimpse of the mingled force

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and unselfishness of this man's character as he turned towards her, and she learned his heart then, at once, and for ever.

'No, I am not ill,' he said; 'but how long you have been—an hour, I should think. I was afraid you had gone home through the village.'

'Oh, no,' she said gently. 'I always go and return by way of the cowslip-gate.'

'Do you call it that? I shall always think of it by that name now; and no one is allowed to use it but you?'

'The boys do sometimes,' she said absently; 'but no one else. The villagers are afraid of the woods, for they get lost in them, and only a pair of sweethearts wander in now and then by chance.'

'Do no strangers ever trespass here?' he said, talking for the mere sake of prolonging those precious moments that would so soon be over.

'You are the first stranger who has come to Lovel for many years,' she said, looking at him wistfully; 'Martha knew you for one directly—she has lived in the parish forty years, and knows the face of every man, woman, and child in it by heart.'

'Yet I have been in Lovel more than once within the last forty years,' he said absently, and as one whom a thought had just struck that he must puzzle out later.

'But the most curious thing of all is,' went on the girl, 'that Job should have mistaken you for Frank; for I know now that he did .... it is written on his face .... and I bless you for the kind thought of him that brought you here just in time, and made him die so happy.'

'Yes, he mistook me,' said the stranger; 'and do you bless me, too?' he said gently, and with such yearning tenderness as moved her heart to pity for him; 'then, if

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so, and since once your mother blessed me, I can never be truly wretched. And keep your old beautiful belief in Frank—perhaps he deserved it—and your mother loved him, and your father loved him too, once; and it is something to be shrined so beautifully in a young girl's heart.'

'Now you are speaking like yourself,' she said joyously; for to the core of her heart she was human, and loved all things, hating to find speck or stain in any; 'like Lancelot, who was proud, you may be sure, of his brother knights.'

'And Frank is Lancelot?' he said.

'No, you are Lancelot,' she said, looking at him with those clear boy's eyes that sometimes shine out of a young girl's face; 'I shall always think of you by that name.'

'So you will think of me sometimes, child?' he said, a gleam of sunshine crossing his sad face. 'You will spare a thought or two from your hero to give to me?'

'Yes,' she said earnestly; 'and, somehow, you have brought him *nearer* to me—I know now how soldiers look and speak; I have got a better, more sober idea about him now. He will always seem to me "the heart of a lost angel in the earth;" but I think that to be a hero one need not be young and beautiful . . . and I have often thought,' she went on, colouring a little as one who fears to preach, 'how much less easy we find it to see saints in the human beings around us, than to dress up some scarcely seen, unknown creature in heroic guise, and, placing it in a niche, fall down and worship it! We cry out in wonder at the blindness of the men and women of old who stoned their saints and heroes, knowing them not, and every day are noble deeds done,

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noble lives drop, or are slain in the struggle, and we bury them as common clay, carve no headstone above them; and the noblest heroes, the purest saints, are those who in their lifetime toiled unnoticed, unrecognised, among their very nearest and dearest, perhaps faintly pitied by them, as well as loved.'

'And do you have such beautiful thoughts as these?' said the stranger, who knew—ah, God!—the mockery of this pity that we take thankfully from lesser souls; 'are these the things that go on in a young girl's mind? And your mother had such thoughts—even to her dying day.'

'Did you know my mother *very* well?' said Madcap, whose colour had waxed brilliant long before her 'sermon' was over, and who felt herself quite undeserving of his words.

'*Very* well,' he said slowly. 'She was not always here, you know; she was brought up by Lady Betty Tremayne. Is Lady Betty living still?'

'Yes; but father never forgave her for being unkind to my mother.'

A look of anger crossed the stranger's face. Had no one else been unkind to that beloved little Madcap, whose living image stood before him?

The girl saw the shade on his brow; it was curious how quickly she had learned his features, and got an insight into his thoughts; and she exclaimed:

'*Why* do you so dislike my father? Was it because you loved Frank so much—for you *did* love him?'

'Yes,' he said, looking relieved at the turn her questions had taken; 'he and I were friends during the short time we were together, and I thought your father was not just to Lord Lovel.'

'Yet he was three years looking for his old friend,' said Madcap sadly, 'and only came up with him too

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late; and why should he have taken all that trouble to find him, if he had not loved him?'

Ay, the stranger knew something of the history of those three years in which Frank Lovel had been literally hunted by Mr. Eyre half round the world and back again, escaping him only by a hair's-breadth in the trenches before Sevastopol.

Often the two men, the pursuer and the pursued, had been in the very same town together, so hotly had Mr. Eyre followed on Frank's tracks. No murderer fleeing for his life had been more cunning, no detective more acute, than the two men, who had been dearest friends such a short time ago.

'So you will not answer me,' said Madcap proudly, after a long pause; 'but do you think you will be any the happier for implanting in my heart the first doubt I have ever had of my dear father?'

'Have I done so?' he said, turning swiftly, and seeming to see in her face the beginning of one of those long, long shadows that had missed her mother's lips, but stilled her heart; 'then God forgive me, and take the doubt away. Frank Lovel loved him, so did your mother, so do you; the man who can command such love as that, should be, *must* be, above other men.'

'And if you have had bitter thoughts of him, you renounce them now?' she said earnestly; 'you will forgive him?'

'He never wronged me,' said Frank; 'for myself I have nothing to forgive—it was for others . . . but they are dead, and all is over and done with now.'

Madcap sighed, only half satisfied, then sighed again, as she held out her hand to wish him 'good-bye.'

But he did not, could not take it; the last moment was even more unendurable in its bitterness than he had

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expected, and the strong man's heart seemed to stand still as he looked at her.

The soft gloom of the wood, the glory of light in the meadow beyond, the hundred scents that came to their senses, crowned by the fragrance of the field of blossoming beans afar off, the woodland lights and shadows that left nothing still, but kept all in motion, matching the ever-changing freshness of the sea, the very song of a bird above them, seemed to enter neither into the soul, eye, nor ear of the man and child who stood in their midst, yet unconsciously sank into their hearts, so that the man never forgot the smallest detail of the scene; and years after, as she stood in winter on the same spot, bit by bit Madcap remembered it.

'Good-bye,' she said again; and then he took the little outstretched hand. 'Perhaps you will come back some day; and we shall be glad to see you, father and I.'

'I shall never come back,' he said, his eyes hard and strained as he looked at her. 'I have seen you for the first, last time . . . and though you have been kind to me, do not *wish* that I should ever come back; it would not be for your happiness, or that of those you love. I shall never go through the cowslip-gate—would to God that I might!' he added, with a passion in his voice before which the girl trembled.

'But when father comes home, you may,' she said, feeling lifted into a new world as she gazed at him; 'if you have quarrelled, he would *forgive* you, as you have forgiven him.'

'No,' said the stranger, almost sternly. 'I shall never cross it while your father lives. . . And now good-bye, little Madcap—little friend!' and he kissed her hand reverently, as though she had been a young saint, before he gently laid it down.

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'Good-bye,' she said, not knowing that tears were in her eyes, and so passed through the cowslip-gate. . . . Half-way through the meadow she turned, and, shading her brow, saw that he was still there, and made a little gesture to him as of farewell . . . but as she turned homewards, knew not that if his youth, his hopes of joy, lay for ever divided from him by the impassable barrier of the cowslip-gate, even for her the ivory gates had for ever closed on the unruffled, happy days of her childhood.

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CHAPTER VI.

'And so farre from making herself beautiful by art, that one looke of hers is able to put all face physicke out of countenance.'

'NAN,' said Madcap, next morning, 'will you go to the cowslip-gate, and look inside it? You will find a meat pasty, if the birds have not eaten it, and some other things that I forgot yesterday.'

'Can't Saunders go, Miss Madcap?' said the woman, hardly looking up from her long seam. 'I've got a sight of needlework to do between this and dinner.'

'Yes, there you sit, sewing, sewing, sewing, till I wonder you don't turn into a real machine. And I should like to know what it *is* you are always stitching at, without ever a breath of fresh air, except on Sunday, when you go to church. If they were shirts or nightcaps for Geordie, I could understand your perpetual stitch, stitch; for you know, Nan' (she shook her head gravely), 'you've got only *one* idol, and that's Geordie; but as they look like things for *me*, why, do you expect me to live to be a Mrs. Methuselah?'

'Young ladies get married sometimes,' said Nan, as she threaded her needle, then looked round apprehensively, as if Mr. Eyre might be in two places at once, 'and it's as well to be beforehand. I've kept you speckless from three years old, and not a soul but me shall do

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a stitch of plain linen for you as long as you're Miss Madcap.'

'And pray when am I going to be *Mrs. ?*' said Madcap, who sat cross-legged on the nursery floor, and thought that talking to even Nan was better than talking to herself.

'When you get married, Miss Madcap, to be sure.'

'And who am I going to marry?' said the girl, in so matter-of-fact a tone that the woman started.

'Well, there,' said Nan, looking at her young mistress with strong disfavour, 'it's early days to talk of that yet, but if you don't know I can't tell you. To be sure, there's not much choice, but sometimes the finest peach is set a-top of the basket, and them's wise that take it, and don't go farther.'

'I never saw any man in the least like a peach,' said Madcap dubiously; 'though, to be sure, I've met very few in my life—for I suppose Gordon is a young man now.'

'And hasn't *he* got a skin like a peach?' said Nan indignantly.

'More shame for him!' said Madcap; 'peach cheeks are for women, not men.'

'Well!' said Nan, laying down her seam in the effort to gulp down her wrath; 'and you always talking about the last Lord Lovel, miss, who was as fair as his mother, folks say.'

'He would be dark enough now if he had lived,' said Madcap, delighted at Nan's anger; 'the idea only occurred to me quite, quite lately, that perhaps when Gordon is older, *much* older, he will be better looking!'

'Better looking!' said Nan, to whom this jest was deadly earnest, 'when you couldn't find his match in the whole county! Why, saving your presence, Miss Mad-

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cap, Master Doune ain't a patch on him for beauty or sweet temper, or anything else that a young lady might look for in a husband; and because he never put himself forward, but bears with everybody's ways, he's just overlooked, as saints mostly is when they come lodging with ordinary folk.'

Madcap started: here were her own words of yesterday reproduced in the nurse's homely talk; but it was not of Gordon she was thinking, as she looked at Nan, who was crying now, and with unusual signs of excitement upon her usual stolid, comely face.

'Always overlooked,' she said, 'from the time Master Doune began his studies till master took to eddicating you, Miss Madcap; but never complaining, always the same, and worshipping your very shoestring. But there, it always *was* the lot of the Lovels to be lorded over and wronged by the Eyres.'

'Wronged?' said Madcap, standing up, and a little pale; 'what wrong have we Eyres ever done the Lovels?'

The woman shrank into herself, knowing that she had transgressed the unwritten law that ruled the house and village.

'I spoke in anger, Miss Madcap,' she said, rising humbly, 'and I hope you'll overlook it . . . but I love Master Gordon, and I can't bear to hear a word against him, or even against his skin.'

Madcap kissed her old friend, and thought with a little remorse of Gordon, but presently went away with the faint doubts of yesterday strengthened in her mind . . . the antipathy of Job to her father, as expressed by Martha and confirmed by a hundred signs in the old man, now crowded back on her mind; then the stranger's conviction of wrong done to Lord Lovel; lastly, Nan's

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words put a new light on those past relations that had puzzled her between her father and the stranger.

She went straight to Mr. Eyre's study, as though to exorcise those disloyal thoughts; and when she came to it, and saw his chair in the old familiar place, she kneeled down beside it, with her head upon the place on which his hand had so often rested.

Here he had taught her; here from her babyhood she had found a sanctuary in all troubles, and his arm ready to receive her; here she had played while he wrote, meeting all her demands and interruptions with inexhaustible patience; here she had first essayed 'strokes,' and

> 'Scorned all the fetters
> Of the four-and-twenty letters;'

though, having once mastered them, she applied her knowledge rapidly to the books that Mr. Eyre varied, according to her understanding, from year to year. At this early period of her life he found little difficulty about her religion—for a young child is essentially irreligious; and her questions embarrassed him, while his replies provoked dissatisfaction, when they did not rouse spasms of mirth in her.

For instance, when she stuck one day over the Tenth Commandment, and asked why the house was set before the wife, and he replied in one of those grim asides that he seldom permitted himself, that he supposed it was because the man's wife had married him to please her own taste, while *he* had built his house to please *his*, she did not understand him; but one day she startled him by asking for something to make her laugh out of 'that funny old book' (meaning the Bible), hugging herself all up together with anticipated delight.

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After that, he read to her out of it no more, but left her to herself, knowing that in time religion would grow out of her life, not (as is so commonly believed) her life out of her religion.

Whatever might be beyond his own understanding he left to hers, and however grave his own doubts, he never clouded her mind with any, but gave her mental food of the right kind, and in all things watched over the purity of her morals as faithfully as her mother might have done. No rough words, no slang of any sort, would he permit to be spoken before her; no gossip, no frivolous talk, no village tattling would he suffer. The villagers themselves might pour no diffuse, unprofitable talk into her ears; they must curb their tongues, or go without a sight of her—though, to do them justice, not one would have harmed her by a thought.

She had never looked at a newspaper in her life; even periodicals he eschewed for her, and allowed no miscellaneous reading. There were books in his library she was not permitted to open; and it was his habit to make out at intervals a list for her, and in this list were included but a very small number of works of imagination.

The 'Letters' of Madame de Sévigné, of Gray, Cowper, and Swift; Arnold's 'Essays on Criticism,' and his 'Selections from Wordsworth;' the 'Essays' of Elia, Thackeray's 'Esmond,' and Miss Burney's 'Evelina'—these, with the 'Vicar of Wakefield,' 'Our Village,' and Izaak Walton's 'Compleat Angler,' nearly contained the only light literature he had ever allowed her; but he made one fatal exception when he added the 'Idylls of the King' to her narrow shelf. Shakespeare was too strong meat for her yet; he even hesitated to let her pore too closely into the Bible (that undying record of the

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tragedies of the human heart); but encouraged the reading of history both in her own and three or four other languages.

But, though so solidly educated that hers might almost be said to be a masculine understanding, accomplishments had been altogether omitted, save those natural ones to which a woman should be born, and that require no teaching. She sang like a lark in church and in the woods, but rarely sat down to 'make music' at the piano; rode as well as her father; understood the management of the house, and could sew as beautifully as Nan; had that fine natural taste in dress which is born in one, but never acquired; and, finally, kept her unusual knowledge so entirely out of sight that to ordinary people she appeared but a tricksy, joyous young maid who had never left off dancing since she was born.

And lest she should appear odious through her very charms, I am bound to admit that she had been addicted from an early age to certain reprehensible practices, such as jumping hurdles and five-barred gates, racing the boys on her pony bare-backed round the estate, being a proficient in the art of 'cold-pig,' able to make the best toffee out of stolen materials, and to stamp her foot and lose her temper at a moment's notice.

Mr. Eyre abhorred vanity of any sort, and years ago had said to her: 'If your glass tells you that you are handsome, the only thing you can do is to forget it.'

He had also a horror of a woman who was smart first and truthful afterwards, and hated her to be a great talker, for, said he, 'Her charms speak better for her than any words;' and again, 'A woman's character is invariably revealed by her manner of judging others—especially her own sex.'

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He would not allow her to be one of that noble army of incapables, whose lives are the completest conjugation of the imperative mood that Lindley Murray ever dreamed of. Bells might be in order, and servants' legs in order too; but if she wanted a thing she must fetch it herself, not be for ever ringing.

Against vacillation, too, he warned her: 'If you are in doubt as to the propriety of pursuing some especial course, waste no time, but decide at once not to pursue it; the mere fact that you have doubts about it proves its inexpediency. Some women (invariably fools) always decide in the affirmative.'

Again he would say, 'Every woman ought to have some engrossing duty entirely outside her affections: for if few women have sufficient force of character to deliberately make choice of evil, thousands drift into it because they have nothing to fall back upon;' and he took care that his daughter, at least, should not be without that safeguard.

And now, he who had trained her so purely and thoroughly, who had reared her through a delicate childhood to a strong and vigorous youth—this dear old dad, she thought, as she knelt by his chair, was to be *doubted* by her; and he absent, not able to say a word in his own defence.

Presently she got up, dried her eyes, and took down one of the books he had left for her reading; but for the first time that habit of steady application on which Mr. Eyre had based her whole education failed her, and she stood for a while with the lines clear under her eyes, but devoid of meaning.

As she replaced the book, the title of the one next to it fixed her attention.

It was an 'Army Guide' for the year in which Lord

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Lovel had died; and, trembling a little, as one guilty of disobedience, she took it in her hand.

It opened easily at a particular page, and saved her the trouble of search, for Frank Lovel's regiment was marked with red ink; and though his name did not appear, a cross was placed against a name half-way down the list; the name was 'Methuen.'

The name brought some light to her mind, for more than once Mr. Eyre had spoken to her of that curious letter received from the soldier's mother; but he had spoken of her as unknown, and yesterday the stranger implied a personal knowledge of him, so that there was only perplexity in Madcap's thoughts as she put the book back, and moved restlessly to that second window of the room which looked on the wistaria wall, beneath which had been her mother's favourite seat.

Here she had sat at her needlework or book, while Mr. Eyre, happy since she was within sight, sat at his table, looking out now and then to that sunny corner which held all that made his life worth the living.

Now his table was set so that his back was turned to that deserted spot; but some deeper glimpse into the inner sadness of his life came to his daughter as she looked out, and thought how in this room he must for ever be *almost* (oh, the bitterness of the word!) within touch and call of

> 'The vanished hand,
> And the sound of a voice that is still.'

The girl moved away. What was this trouble in her mind, this unrest and vague foreboding—she, to whom nerves were as much unknown as those fits of depression that often terrified her in Doune?

It was because she was lonely, out of sorts—anything

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but the true cause, the casting of the first stone at the idol she had set up in her heart and worshipped; while, besides, there might be a wistful thought of the stranger she had met yesterday, and whom she was never likely to see again.

As she wandered listlessly to and fro, her

> 'Aimless thoughts,
> Like a babe's hand, without intent
> Drawn down a seven-stringed instrument,'

she came to the lofty screen that concealed the private stair by which Mr. Eyre, each night and morning, rose to and descended from his bed-chamber.

She had not been in that room since she was a child; an impulse of love to him made her visit it now, and she was just turning the corner of the screen when a voice from the distant doorway startled her, and she turned to see Saunders hurrying forward with anxious haste.

'Cook's waiting for orders,' he said; 'and there's a sight of poor folk wanting you in the village. Whatever keeps you indoors such a lovely day as this, Miss Madcap?' he added, a little fretfully, knowing well enough the dangers to which Mr. Eyre's sudden exit had exposed his adored little mistress.

'Cook can wait,' she said, 'so can the village folk;' and she disappeared behind the screen.

The old man stood for a moment without stirring, then shook his head as one who sees bitter trouble ahead.

'Bit by bit she'll find it all out,' he said to himself; 'and it'll break her heart. And it's rightdown sinful of master to leave her, and all for some fad about the murder, or I'm a Dutchman, when it's clear as a pike-staff that Digges done it, with that Jezebel to egg him on.

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But I'll just send Nan.' And he hobbled off to find Madcap's guardian.

Nan checked a scream as, on hurrying to the room, followed by Saunders, she saw Madcap sitting in the armchair, lying back with closed eyes.

'The very image of how her mother looked when she was found,' said Saunders, in an incautiously loud whisper, from the doorway.

'Who was found?' she said, opening her eyes only to see the man vanish, then looked at Nan.

'The chair is so comfortable,' she said, 'and I couldn't sleep last night. But I was not dozing off when you came in; I was thinking about mother—and father—and how he must miss her.'

'Yes, miss,' said Nan, who knew every detail of a certain night's work by heart, and could not bear to see the girl sitting there; 'but such thoughts ain't for a bright day like this; and if you'll come with me—for I'm vastly afeard of them woods—we'll fetch the things you took out to the beggar-man—leastways, if there's any left.'

'No,' said Madcap, jumping up; 'I won't go to the cowslip-gate to-day. If you are frightened, take Saunders; I'm going to my poor people.'

'Anywhere out of *here*,' thought Nan, as she followed the girl, and brought her hat and gloves—last of all her basket, into which Madcap looked with a sudden thought; then turned it upside down, but nothing fell out.

'And I picked such a lot,' she said absently. 'They could not *all* have tumbled out. Has anybody touched it since I came home yesterday?' she added, turning to Nan.

'Nobody, miss,' said Nan, who was a little offended at the rejection of the tremendous sacrifice her offer had

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implied; 'you brought it in on your arm just as it is now; you mostly brings it back empty.'

But it was not empty when she started, ten minutes later, for the village, in which tongues were wagging and heads nodding to an extent unprecedented within these twelve years.

'*Les absents ont toujours tort*,' and Mr. Eyre was to be no exception to the rule. He had been gone barely a week, yet already whispers of his errand were abroad; and now that the grasp of the stern hand which had held all his world in check was relaxed, he suffered the usual fate at the hands of those whose service rested less on love than fear.

Some of the gossipers saw her coming down the hill; saw how half-way she turned back to look at the gray old house that had cradled her so happily, and in which she had never known an hour of sorrow. To her its every aspect was beautiful, and the lurid flames that seemed to rise behind it as the sun set brought no fear to her mind; though often strangers passing through the village would pause and attract attention to the seemingly burning house.

Madcap could not have told the precise point when the first faint doubt, dread as death, of her father, became confirmed by this visit to the village. All welcomed her eagerly, as usual (worshipping the two Madcaps in one), took her generous dole with loving thanks, told her of their joys or woes; but one thing struck her curiously, and it was this, that no one either mentioned or inquired for her father. Yet never before had lip-service failed him; perhaps the thought that his shadow might cross the threshold immediately after his daughter's prompted those respectful inquiries for him that she had accepted as willing tribute to his goodness.

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This silence effected what mere gossip or innuendo could not have done; and the crowning sadness was laid upon her heavy heart in Synge Lane, where she paused to leave one of those little gifts that hither from time to time she brought.

The woman who had received Mr. Eyre so curtly smiled a welcome to Madcap, and ran out to meet her, though not for the sake of her gift, but for herself.

'So your father has gone away, miss?' she said, as the girl was presently departing; 'and has he gone to foreign parts?'

Madcap glanced at the woman, and found something unusual in her; a furtive question, anxiety, and dread, looked out of her eyes, while the rest of the features were sternly controlled, and gave no sign.

'That is Mr. Eyre's business,' said Madcap, in the first unreasonable fit of anger she had ever known; and walked out of the house, leaving the mistress of it confounded.

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CHAPTER VII.

'Not a flower
But shows some touch, in freckle, streak, or stain,
Of His unrivalled pencil . . .'

COWPER.

'Nature never did betray the heart that loved her.'

WORDSWORTH.

'There lives and works
A soul in all things, and that soul is God.'

COWPER.

'The spirit of the worm beneath the sod
In love and worship blends itself with God.'

SHELLEY.

MADCAP felt like the Queen of Sheba, as she sat on the top of a new-mown haycock, pitched on the exact spot that her mother had filled sixteen years ago, and surveyed her kingdom through eyes that had been curiously strengthened during the past three weeks. For hours she had watched the summer seas of grass sink gently to the mowers' scythes, caught a thousand faint vernal scents as they were scattered, but had grown weary at last of that flavour of melilot and clover which out-scented all the rest.

And then she shook her head, thinking how lonely that gorgeous queen must have been; for who ever

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heard of her husband? or, if a maiden, what did she gadding abroad with gifts to the old king, who surely had wives enough already?

Yes, that had been the keystone to Madcap's comparison of the errant queen to herself, that she must have been intensely *lonely* at odd moments in the midst of all her splendour, and perhaps palled of her diamonds and rubies, as this girl was beginning to do of those simple pleasures that had once so entirely satisfied her.

She had enjoyed an uninterrupted month of her own company, and was as sick of it as if it had been the worst in the world; was tired even of her books, and each day and hour felt more keenly that hankering after congenial society which is the strongest natural impulse implanted in the human breast.

'Oh for a good rousing bolstering-match with the boys,' she thought (such events being by no means uncommon, even since her lengthened frocks), or a game at snowballs, in which she was a match for the pair—anything but this dull, dead calm, broken only by the Oxford letters, that held love enough, to be sure, but little enough food for thought.

Mathematics and cricket—cricket and mathematics. Madcap was interested in neither; but if both boys could have rushed in to-day, and she could have put an arm round each neck, she could have listened to them for ever on their several pursuits, being so desperately hungry for the sound of human voices.

She started up and left her haycock, moving towards the villagers, who paused in their tossings as she drew near, and welcomed her eagerly when she asked for a pick and took a turn at labour among them. But more than one head was shaken as presently she moved away.

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'She's over young to be left the Squire,' said one of the women, looking after her; 'and all the frolic's gone out of her feet since master went. She'll aye find it main lonesome up at t' Red Hall.'

'There's trouble upon her,' said another woman, sighing. '*He's* busted out again, and means mischief. And 'tis ill work rousing sleeping dogs. He'd have done better to bide at home.'

'Seems like yesterday the other young missus were sitting there,' and the speaker pointed to the distant haycock, 'and master fired over her head at Hester, who'd ventured to peep over t' hedge; and says he to his wife, with his arms round her, "After all, 'tis only a —a rook!" Just *so*, as if he hadn't missed *murder*. What a man—what a man! Ay, if he never came back it might be best, in the end, for *she*.'

'Oh, she'll be happy enough when the young lord takes her home,' said a third and younger voice; 'she's naught to be pitied, with so many as there be to love her. It's just her mother over again; not a soul to be looked at, so long as the young missus is nigh;' and the young wench tossed her handsome head almost as high as she tossed her hay.

Meanwhile Madcap pursued her way to the meadow she had not once crossed (since there was no Job beyond) during the past month; and, since last she came, the hay in it had been carried, leaving but close-cropped stubble, that smelled to her healthily sweet after the overpowering fragrance of the 'Ten Acre.'

Half-way across it, she looked towards the cowslip-gate. Surely some one was standing there; some one upon whom she had mused and thought much during the past weeks, and whom she would rejoice to see again?

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She ran forward quickly, but the sun must have deceived her, for when she reached the gate not a soul was within sight; and as she stepped into the shadow of the wood, its coolness seemed to touch her heart, and she shivered.

'Will he never come back?' she said aloud; 'not even to look once at Job's grave?'

As she stood, the nearest tree seemed to move, and a man advanced to her side.

'Madcap—little friend!' said a well-remembered voice; and, in a moment, her hand flew to his, and she cried out:

'So you have come back!—and I am so glad, so *very* glad, to see you! I have recollected a hundred questions that I forgot to ask you about Frank!'

He let her hand go, a shade of trouble or disappointment flitting across the new brightness of his face, then said, a little wearily:

'Yes; we will talk about him presently. But first, will you not show me some portion of these woods that you know by heart?'

'Yes; I will show you,' she said joyously, and still a little bewildered by her own satisfaction at seeing him, so that she forgot his last words to her when they had parted at the cowslip-gate, and how this was no friend of her father's that she welcomed so eagerly.

'I could not show you one tithe of them in a week,' she said, as, walking on air, she moved beside him; 'but I will take you first to a haunt of my own, not too far from the cowslip-gate for me to run to, for even ten minutes at a time, nor so near that anyone can find me if I have a mind to hide;' and she walked on tip-toe, and put one finger up, as she brought him soon into a little lovely hollow, where the sylvan flowers lingered longest,

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and whence innumerable glades, mingling with the broken woodland, made new vistas of eternal beauty, while a natural throne of velvet at the foot of a giant beech commanded all.

Madcap sprang lightly to her well-loved seat, laid one hand on the great moss-covered roots that stretched high above the sward, for a moment leaned her shoulder to the moss-grown bole at her back, then would have stepped down into the hollow where the stranger stood, but that he came to meet her, begging her to stay.

'Let us rest here,' he said eagerly. 'I have travelled far to-day, and am very tired.'

She looked down at him, hesitating, her hand half fluttering out to meet his lifted one . . . no one had ever rested in that green chair but she, save, perchance, some flitting moonlight thing, or, by day, some saucy squirrel . . . but a longer look at him made her sure that he *was* tired, and miserable too; so that all at once her hand found his, and in a moment they were sitting side by side.

They might have been King and Queen as seen from the end of one of those long vistas beyond; a thousand eyes might, unsuspected, have watched them, a thousand ears have hearkened to their talk; but, you see, Madcap was used to sitting there alone, and she loved the many loopholes of her outlook, that enabled her to steal away silently at the slightest sign or sound of pursuit. The green chair was big; it might have held four Madcaps, though scarcely two Colonel Busbys.

'Hark!' she said, holding up her finger; 'do you hear that—like the whetting of a saw? And it is only the titmouse, and the little impostor has only those two notes with which to frighten one!'

'So you cannot bear to see a tree fall? Neither could

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your mother,' he said, looking earnestly at the sylvan landscape. 'Often would she

'"Read *me* a lecture of her country art."

Will you not read me one, too?'

'What can I tell you?' she said, looking dreamily out; 'have you not seen it all before—anything that I could tell you—but with *young* eyes? only I wish you could see these woods in spring, when you have to pick your steps so that you may not crush a flower.'

'And yet,' he said, 'you step so lightly; like Ellen, my favourite heroine—

'"E'en the light harebell raised its head
Elastic from her airy tread."'

'Oh, no!' she said; 'that is a poetic conceit; and, besides, she would have stopped to pick some . . . but when I have filled my lap, somehow I feel as if I had been taking *lives*, they grow so tall, and straight, and happy, and open their eyes much as we do; and they are set just where is best for them, and last so many happy days in shine and shade—it seems a selfish whim to put them in water for a day or two, then throw them away for new favourites.'

'So she is faithful,' thought the stranger; 'and so was her mother—with one exception.'

'Boys don't understand these things as girls do,' she said, sighing. 'Doune is always in the classics, and Gordon doesn't know a bluebell from a hyacinth, and *loves* his boating and cricket; he would bowl just as hard over cowslips' heads as over a shaved meadow; and I can *almost* fancy him settling down as you said Frank would, and getting a little bald and stout. Poor Geordie!'

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But her heart reproached her as she said the words; and she looked up quickly at the stranger.

'Don't think that I am blaming him,' she said; 'I love him dearly. It is because he is so *good* that we have all overlooked him. But I'll try and be better to him before he comes home to settle down for good!'

'When will that be?' said the stranger.

'Oh, a good long while yet,' she said gravely. 'He wants to come home, but I said he must stay longer at Oxford, to take care of Doune.'

'Does Doune want especial taking care of?'

'He is a genius,' said Madcap proudly, but with a happy smile on her lips, 'and, of course, he has no common-sense; but Gordon has plenty. So while *I* am not taking care of Doune, Gordon must.'

'Poor Gordon, indeed!' said the stranger under his breath; 'the Lovel fate over again.'

'Did you speak?' she said, looking at him as if to seek a reason for the unaccountable delight his grave companionship gave her.

'I am waiting for that lecture,' he said, with the 'blink' of sunshine that she remembered crossing his lips and eyes.

'How long shall it be?' she said, falling into his humour, and wishing that her talk might soothe him to peace, for there were deeper lines of suffering on his face to-day than there had been a month ago.

'Half an hour—an hour,' he said; 'for I am not likely ever to sit here by your side again. I was in Lovel to-day on Job's business, little friend; but I could not keep away from the cowslip-gate, and, by good luck, you came.'

'Oh, you will come back again some day,' she said gently, 'and you will go *through* it;' then shrank a little,

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like one who unwittingly touches fire, as he looked away from her, his face suddenly grown stern, but yet more weary than before.

Madcap had only a child's heart, strong and true (though she looked a woman), and she was used to Doune's dark hours, and longed to solace *this* one; but before she could summon up courage to speak, he had turned to her, and for the third time demanded his 'lecture.'

'To begin with, then,' said Madcap, on that instant, 'both you and I are sitting in the embrace of a court beauty, who wears a velvet suit, slippers herself yet more delicately in moss, while her waistcoat is always of silver, even when in autumn her skirts glow in pure russet-gold. The Lady Chestnut may get the better of her in the matter of bloom, but her outlines are clumsy and over-rude beside this delicate beauty; and even the oaks cannot hold their own before her . . . the stock-doves are all her lovers; you will see them follow even a distant rustle of her petticoats for a mile through the woods . . . they follow no other so, for birds have finer taste than human beings—though they are their echoes, and caricature all their absurdities. Have you ever watched them?' she went on quickly, content to talk, so long as she could charm the sadness from his face.

'I have listened to them,' he said; 'but somehow I have never thought of birds except as singing or hungry——'

But his voice sounded ghostly in his own ears; and was he not indeed a ghost, and had he not come back from the dead to hold living converse with one whose image had slept these twelve years beneath the tomb?

'There is a life between the two,' she said, looking

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down her beloved glades, and speaking softly to herself; 'there is marrying, building, rearing the young family. . . . Have you ever seen a house-martin feed her young?' she added, a smile breaking her thoughts as she looked at him. 'First by some miracle she sets them all in a row on the top bar of some secluded gate. Then she forages, and skims back to feed each little one flying, and it is miraculous how cleverly and neatly the business is done on both sides—a pattern to our village mothers if only they would take heed of it! But nearly all the birds are good parents; owls come back once in five minutes to look at their young, wrens once in two, swallows every second or third minute, and some of the others even oftener than that.'

The stranger looked at Madcap keenly. Yes, here was the true mother's instinct beating in her young breast, the one crowning, womanly charm without which a woman is less flower than weed.

'But they are not all good,' she added gravely; 'a raven deserts her young as soon as hatched, and none have ever been able to find out how they are fed—by dew? or worms bred in the nest? And some—oh, but some of them have tempers! The whitethroat will pop his head up over the hedge, and make faces at you if he thinks you are near his nest, flirt his tail, and be positively insulting in his manner; and nightingales, if you happen to meet them when taking their young out for a first walk, will pursue you along the hedge as you walk, snapping defiantly in your ears, and telling you as plainly as possible to get home . . . and there are rogues—the hen harriers, who beat the fields of corn regularly like pointers or setter dogs . . . the ravens, who spend all their spare time in cuffing each other on the wing, frowned on by the solemn crows, who fly in

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pairs all the year round, and look upon Valentine's Day as a frivolous business. Oh, there is something to laugh at or admire in every *one*, just as in the people that they mimic!'

'Have you found one who apes me?' said the stranger, long ago roused out of his thoughts, and turning sideways in his moss-grown elbow-chair to look at her.

'Perhaps,' she said, a little sadly, 'as I have found one for Doune—the gold-crested wren, who will not mingle with crowds, but holds aloof in fields and woods, and *starves* because he can suffer, but cannot brook pity . . . then there is the crow,' she said, in a brighter tone, 'who swaggers in his walk, and is Colonel Busby's double; and the daw is Mrs. Busby, with only half his strut (he would never permit more); and the magpies and jays, who beat the air with their wings, yet make no despatch, are like——'

'Me?' he said; 'for I have practically stood still these fourteen years——'

'Foolish persons with weak wills,' said the young lecturer, frowning; for by now she had got into the swing of her own voice, and sincerely loved its sound.

'And a blue titmouse,' she continued, 'perched on the head of a sunflower, devouring its seeds, is like one of those frivolous young maids who marry only to devour their husbands' substance; while a greenfinch who goes a-wooing puts on all the languishing die-away airs and gestures of a village beauty, who sighs in vain for some rustic Jock. And the swifts, who dash round in circles, are the ne'er-do-weels who never advance; the larks and wagtails, who walk so daintily, moving one foot before another as we do ourselves, are the bright, brisk housemothers, whose cottages are all in order, and who are smart even for their husbands.'

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'Is that so very uncommon?' said the lecturer's only pupil.

'Very! Then a rook, when he goes a-courting, will try and sing, but only makes a harsh and horrible noise that splits your ears; and a crow will make himself ridiculous in the same way, and they always make me think of——'

'Middle-aged men wooing young maids?'

'To be sure!' said Madcap, 'as sometimes happens in our village; but father always interferes, and puts a stop to any of those unequal matches. And the peacock is the fine lady whose worth is all upon her back, so that none was left over for her voice or disposition. . . . I have seen just such a lady! Then the skylark always shows to me like some gallant pure soul hampered by a weak body, for, soar as he may, and does perpetually, he sinks more swiftly than he can rise; and the meteor-like flash of the goatsucker is like the flight of a beautiful thought, and the lightning flash of the kingfisher like an inspiration that comes into a human soul, it knows not whence! And a starling should belong to the sea, for he swims in the air—but there are so many,' she added, stopping short in her lecture, 'I should bore you to death if I told you one-half of them!'

'So we all have our *döppel-gangers* among the birds,' he said. 'Well, I have found one for you; you are a swallow, for your walk is like the flight of one, but your voice is like the blackcap's, and I am beginning to suspect you of possessing the owl's wisdom——'

'"Silly swallow, prating thing,"' quoted Madcap, laughing; 'yes, that suits me very well. But I do not like the owl; he is my only enemy in all the wood. He can scream, snore, scold, and hiss like a thousand snakes, all in less than a minute; but I love the deep

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and solemn note he sometimes uses, and that makes the forest re-echo for miles!'

'But surely you never come here at night alone?' he said, thoroughly startled.

'Oh yes, often,' she said; 'if I cannot sleep, or anything has vexed me. And by moonlight it is far more exquisite than by day . . . have you ever studied the moonlight flowers?' she went on, looking at him wistfully; 'for they are all so pale, so weird, as if the moon had looked into all their pretty faces one by one, and made them cold and still like herself . . . their very scent is faint and ghostly, as in a dream. And sometimes I find a rabbit sitting up on my chair and washing his face; sometimes, as I sit quite still, one or other of the night animals runs across my knee, and I get all sorts of queer peeps into the creatures' habits; for it is in the night only that the forest animals *live*.'

'It is not right for a young thing like you to be wandering here alone at night,' said the stranger, frowning. 'Did he leave *no one* to take care of you?' he added, thinking that Mr. Eyre's confidence in her read very like neglect.

'To be sure,' she said, laughing; 'there is Nan—but she is terrified of these woods even by day, and no earthly powers would draw her here after nightfall!'

'And you say no one at home knows of this haunt of yours,' he went on, in a dissatisfied tone. 'Supposing you fell ill here—or were robbed and murdered by some stranger or footpad?'

'I wear no ornaments,' she said; 'and strangers and footpads do not know the way.'

'Am not I a stranger?' he said, looking at her keenly; 'and would you have treated *anybody* as kindly as you treated me?'

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Madcap turned her head aside to hide a smile.

Here was that jealousy which seemed to afflict all her male belongings, extending even to chance acquaintances; but she was grave again as she said:

'You were mother's friend, and Job's—and Frank's; and you will tell me all about yourself, some day—for I must be going back to my hay now.'

'Yes,' he said, looking at her eagerly, yearningly, as a man may at something he knows to be forbidden to him, but that soon will have passed beyond the reach of his power to behold it; yet the present was *his*—he would beat out his little span of joy to its utmost limit . . . had he by hard longing (for surely intense wishing had brought her) summoned her footsteps to the cowslip-gate, only to let her go so quickly?

'Let us make a bargain,' he said; 'give me another lecture—just a little one—and I'll tell you all about Frank—and myself. The hay will do well enough without you. Tell me something of the daylight life of these woods, and how you spend your hours in them.'

'How can I tell you?' said the girl. 'Men don't understand these things—even father does not; and you would think I was idling away my time when I am learning something new at every step. Anyone could learn the avenues in a day, but half a dozen miles of broken woodland are another matter, and there are such beautiful things outside the wood—in our own grounds, in the meadows, everywhere.'

'Tell me of some of them,' he pleaded, happy only so long as her young voice ran on. 'I am going to settle down in the country myself before very long, and I expected to be dull; but your knowledge will help me.'

'What can I tell you,' she said, 'if you have not lived among such things? If you have never been caught in a

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thicket of blossomed thorn; never followed the plough and smelled the sweet, fresh earth; never watched a daisy hang all its petals downwards at sunset, or a poppy fold its heart into a red cup at even . . . never marked the little snowy half-closed umbrellas made by the wind-flowers, or seen the light glistening at sunset on a field of spiders' webs, aërial bridges tossed from blade to blade of grass, and stronger than any made by human hands, since the heaviest footfall will not break them—have you seen any of these?'

'No,' he said, as she paused, and he saw that she had forgotten him in her thoughts; 'I have seen none of these things; but I will look for them all some day.'

'There is always some new delight,' she went on softly, as if to herself; 'some lovely accident, as *we* think; but set there to help us to

'"Live more nearly as we pray."

One day it may be a sunset to startle one into a real understanding of heaven . . . another it will be a sheet of emerald grass shining through a row of tall poplars just budding into brown . . . or it will be a carpet of blue anemones in January, when no other flower is abroad; or to see a field of tares and wheat sway to the breeze, scarlet in one light, gold in another . . . or——'

She paused, and burst out laughing at herself.

'Oh, what nonsense I am talking!' she said; 'as if a soldier could be expected to know or care anything about such matters! But it has been a great relief to me to say it, all the same,' she added, nodding; 'and I am very much obliged to you, indeed, for listening to me.'

'I shall remember it all,' he said; and thought how he need not fear for her, since she had real religion—

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the religion of a beautiful fearless life, that beat in entire harmony with the works of her Creator.

'Have you ever tried to write down your thoughts? Your father was a celebrated thinker in his youth.'

'No,' she said slowly; 'I have never tried; and I think I never shall. But if I *had* tried to write, do you know how it would have ended? I should have gone on trying all my life; and when I had become quite old, I should have called my friends together, and asked them to hear the fruits of my labours. And then they would all cry out, "But it is centuries old!" And I would say, "Yes; it is the last chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes; but it has my soul, my best effort, in it; and I have no better."'

'You have chosen a sad form of expression, child,' he said, struck by the solemn stillness of her voice and look.

'Are not the young sad?' she said, 'or why does one's heart ache in spring, when older people cannot tell it from early summer? I think it must be because *our* suffering is before us; *theirs* is behind them.'

'Why must you suffer?' he said, his heart sinking as he looked at her; 'God forbid that you should——'

'Why should I not?' she said, looking at him gravely. 'It is the lot of all; and the happiest, the best beloved, are always those who suffer most.'

'Where did you learn all this?' he said, hardly knowing whether to be glad or sorry that the young eyes looking out on life were so clear.

'Perhaps out of my own heart,' she said; 'perhaps out of the village; perhaps out of my Book of Ecclesiastes. And that is why I think my mother's lot needs no grieving over. She went away in the full tide of her

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happiness. It is for *ourselves* we may grieve, not her. And you say you knew her very well,' she went on gently; 'but it must have been before she married father, for he did not seem to know your name when your mother wrote to him.'

Had the afternoon grown suddenly colder? The shivering note of a willow-wren filled up the moment of silence before he turned to her and said:

'So you have known my name all along?'

'I think you must be Major Methuen,' she said, and wondered to see how haggard he had gone all at once, for during the past minutes he had seemed to grow younger; 'and I am glad you have come home to your mother,' she added softly, 'for she said you were her only son, and she a widow.'

'Yes, she is happy now,' he said, as one whose thoughts were not in his words; 'we are going to settle down together in the country next month. I was always a bad correspondent, and she thought——'

'That you must be dead,' said Madcap, sighing; 'but it was poor Frank who died.'

'What on earth is the link between him and me?' said the soldier, a flush of something that looked like anger rising to his tanned brow; 'everywhere I am received for him, taken for a dull echo of him—a makeshift that bears some faded resemblance to the dead hero. I'm positively sick of hearing myself called Lovel, and being clapped on the shoulder every time I venture to go to my club by some man who vows he used to know me under another name.'

'But was there any resemblance between you?' said Madcap, sitting erect, and understanding Job's mistake better.

'There was the likeness that may exist between two

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fair men of exactly the same height and build,' he said carelessly, 'though I never saw it myself. Men dropped like flies in those days, and looked less at each other's faces than at the enemy; but our supposed resemblance was a matter of common remark in the regiment. Then the circumstances of our joining were almost identical: both had sold out of the Guards, both had applied for leave of service in the war at the same time, and both for the same reason (though they alone knew it)—a bad heartache of some years' standing. So for the short time we fought together we were friends, and when one died, the other must needs be received as his friend's ghost.

'It was the commonplace order of our looks that did it, I suppose,' added Major Methuen, still with that impatient flush on his brow; 'but how men in their senses can pretend to recognise in middle age one out of a pair of yellow-haired boys, I can't imagine. There never *was* an uncommon line in either of our faces; there are hundreds like us to be met with in the streets any day.'

'Are there?' said Madcap, a little coldly at this underrating of Frank. 'I have always heard very differently .... but I see that you never *really* liked him or knew how to value him.'

'Did I not?' he said, with a queer smile; 'yet we were friends enough to have no secrets from each other (save one, and that concerned a woman), and on the eve of battle we exchanged——' he paused abruptly, and said no more.

'Frank was not a lad when he died,' said Madcap; 'he was nearly twenty-seven—six years older than Gordon. Perhaps you were *older*—though you need not be so very glad of that now,' she added, looking round at him with

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a little feminine touch of spite that even an angel will indulge in, if you disparage her favourite saint.

But he only smiled, and she laughed, so that peace was restored between them, though her next question endangered it.

'Pray,' said she, 'were both your heartaches for one and the same person?'

She was looking at him earnestly, as though by his reply she might find the key to an enigma that puzzled her. . . .

'Why do you ask that?' he said, his eyes steady, though his colour changed.

'Because Job told me once that Frank loved my mother,' she said, resting her cheek on one hand and looking at him thoughtfully; 'but she loved father best, and, of course, she married him. Did you love her too? and is that why you speak of her so tenderly, and love *me?*'

'So you know I love you, child?' he said, turning to her swiftly. 'God bless you for saying that—yes, I *did* love her; and I lost her only to find her once more—and once more—to lose her.'

'No, not lost,' she said. 'I will love you for my mother's sake and my own . . . and you will forgive father; if he wronged you, it was unwittingly——'

But he had started up; she sat alone on her green throne, and he was standing below in the green hollow, gazing straight before him, as if through the glade he saw some fearsome thing approach.

'Good-bye, little one—little child!' he said, turning to her suddenly, as she stood half-longing, half-fearing to descend, and she saw in his eyes the look, the tears, that she had surprised in them once before; 'only one thing could ever bring me back—your being in trouble, which, please God, you never shall be.'

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'Good-bye,' she said gently, asking no questions, as some children and women will, God knows, and vex a man's soul even while he loves them; but when he reached up and took her slender hand, she laid her other over it, and held it fast.

For a moment the strong man bowed his head on them. '*If I might stay,*' she thought she heard him say; but in another moment, and with no further leave-taking, she was standing alone above the hollow, and she could not see which way he went for tears . . . and then (for her child's heart had gone out to him) she sat down and cried—cried, not knowing it, for the peace that had fled away with him for ever, but should come back to her perchance in other guise, bringing with it better gifts than those ignorant ones over which she so passionately wept.

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CHAPTER VIII.

'This is the thing which I know—and which, if you labour faithfully, you shall also know—that in Reverence is the chief joy and power of life—Reverence for what is pure and bright in your youth; for what is true and tried in the age of others; for all that is gracious among the living, great among the dead, and marvellous in the Powers that cannot die!'—RUSKIN.

ONE late June morning ill news came riding full gallop to the Red Hall, and Colonel Busby was the Mercury that bore it.

His horse's heels struck out sparks of news as he flew, so that everybody had the news before he reached the Red Hall, bursting with such importance that Saunders was sure of something amiss, and admitted him instantly.

'Find your young mistress immediately,' he said, puffing himself out like a frog, as, uninvited, he marched with stately step into the dining-room.

'My mistress is out, sir,' said the man, using the formula Mr. Eyre had directed him to use to all callers in his absence, though in this instance he spoke truth; adding, 'She has probably gone to the woods.'

'Out!' said Colonel Busby, bouncing as he stood. '*Out* on such an occasion as this? She must be found, and found immediately.'

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'You bring no bad news, sir, I hope,' said the butler, pausing at the door.

'Well, well,' said Colonel Busby, 'you'll hear presently. Your mistress must be told first, and not in a sudden way. I shall, of course, break it to her gently—gently. I am used to these things, you know.'

'Very true, sir,' said Saunders drily, as he departed; for who ever knew Colonel Busby to be above five minutes late for any disaster within a radius of ten miles?

He flattered himself he was in at the death now, as he walked up and down the room, growing more and more impatient as the minutes went by, and still Madcap did not come. Why, good heavens! she might be told of it in the village, and here was he cooling his heels, when he had half the county to ride round that morning with his news.

When the half-hour struck, he could contain himself no longer, but rang the bell; and when Saunders appeared, said abruptly:

'Mr. Eyre is dead.'

The man started back with a cry of horror.

'Yes, here it is,' said Colonel Busby, struggling to pull a pink paper out of his pocket. 'I have it posted for me from town every afternoon, so that I am always half a day ahead of everybody else with my news. See here,' and he unfurled the paper with a flourish, and pointed a fat forefinger at certain capital letters—'BURNING OF THE SAILING-SHIP *ARIZONA*; all hands lost, and one passenger—Doune Hamilton Eyre.'

The old butler thought of Madcap, as he covered his eyes with two trembling hands, blaming himself for a curious feeling of something very like relief.

'Yes, he's dead,' said Colonel Busby cheerfully, 'and

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just as one might expect—quite in his usual way. I mean, as he did things in life, involving all around him in disaster, and disappearing, like a sort of middle-aged Casabianca, in the flames that lit the burning deck, etc.; for he must *posé*, if only to the elements.'

'My master will be deeply regretted, sir,' said the butler; 'he was greatly respected by all, and much loved by his family.'

'Ah, yes—to be sure,' said Colonel Busby, drawing in his horns; 'you see, it is owing to his being so well known that we have got the intelligence so quickly; plenty of sailing-ships are burnt or lost, but they don't get capital letters in the newspapers.'

'My master may have left the ship,' said Saunders thoughtfully; 'until we receive further particulars, sir, I think it will be better not to say anything to Miss Madcap. No doubt Mr. Doune has seen the paper by now, and will be here before evening.'

'I hope it *is* a mistake,' said Colonel Busby coldly, as he folded up his paper, and feeling that it would be the unkindest cut of all from his old enemy, did that enemy return to prove his information incorrect.

'Well, good-day. I suppose your mistress will be found in the course of the morning; very improper—very improper indeed—her wandering about at all hours by herself, and in those miles of woods, too—highly irregular;' and he fussed himself on to his horse, and out of sight.

'I must go and find her,' said the old man aloud, as he re-entered the house; 'so long as she's not gone on to the village, there's none to tell her. But 'tis like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay,' he muttered, as he went to caution the other servants against saying anything to her if she soon came in.

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They had already got the news from the village, and some wept, and some trembled; one did not believe it, and another did; but all agreed they had felt trouble in the air ever since master had 'broken out' in May.

'They said he was dead once before,' said Nan, who heard the news last, 'and he came back safe and sound, and so he will now; and p'raps sorrow 'll soften Miss Madcap's heart a bit to Master Gordon,' she added to herself hopefully.

The old butler never walked so far under good green wood as he walked that morning; but not a flutter of his young mistress's gown did he catch sight of, not a trace of her could he find; and having lost himself four or five times, was thankful to reach the village, which he found in a state of extraordinary excitement and gossip.

The daily papers had arrived, and confirmed Colonel Busby's news, and no one seemed to doubt the truth of it, though this second report of Mr. Eyre's death was very differently received to that former one which twelve years ago had convulsed the village.

To-day all tongues spoke kindly, if they did not bitterly deplore him; for if to the last he remained a man only truly lovable to his immediate home-circle, he had at least won the respect of these poor people by his faithful care of his children. Many of the villagers remembered how harshly they had thought and spoken of him lately; yet beneath all their words and thoughts ran the underlying current that perhaps it was best for *her* that it should be thus, for now there would be no raking up of the old wretched story of sin and shame, no continuance of that pursuit on which he had departed; but all shortcomings, all wrong-doings, for ever rounded off in a death that perchance had in it some elements of grandeur.

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So, in some subdued way, his people talked of him that morning, until Saunders appeared in their midst, and then they rushed to him, asking how the young mistress 'took it.'

'Miss Madcap doesn't know,' said Saunders, with dignity; 'no more do I. You'd best all wait a bit before putting on mourning; master's as likely as not to walk in this very night. Who's to say where he got out, or that he ever meant to go all the voyage of the *Arizona?*'

And he disappeared up the hill that led to Mr. Eyre's house, leaving his listeners plunged in a cold bath of astonishment.

'To be sure, old Busby's facts is mostly lies,' said a villager, scratching his head; 'and 'twas he as said master was dead once afore. M'appen 'twill be best to stick to our wark, in case he comes home promiskis and catches us a-napping;' and the speaker shouldered his spade, and departed at once, to put his own suggestion into practice.

Gradually the little crowd dispersed, but only to gather again as a stranger came quickly through, tall, bronzed, and bearded, looking neither to right nor left, as he, too, climbed the approach to the Red Hall.

'It's *true*, then,' said one of the women, looking after him; 'and he's come to break it to her; maybe some friend of her mother's family. He's a bit like the old Lord Lovel, though, to be sure, *he* died afore he was forty.'

'M'appen 'tis the young Lord Lovel 'ud comfort her best,' said another. 'There's no cure for tears like a sweetheart's arm round your waist; but he'll be here by sundown, no doubt.'

The stranger passed Saunders on the way, so that

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a woman opened the door to him, and, to his inquiry for her mistress, merely said she was 'out.'

To his inquiry whether any bad news had been received at the Red Hall that morning, the woman said 'Yes;' but added that the young mistress did not know of it, as she had already gone out when Colonel Busby called.

'Prating fool!' muttered the visitor below his breath, as he turned and went through the grounds straight to the meadow, beyond which was the cowslip-gate he had told Madcap he must never cross.

But he went through it now without a thought, and pushed swiftly on; that curious local memory which we form under moments of strong excitement guiding him as he went forward, so that he scarcely missed a yard of the way he had gone with Madcap a fortnight ago, and soon reached a point where he saw her in dim perspective, sitting in her green chair, with one elbow on its arm, and one hand supporting her cheek.

He could not, at that distance, see if she looked glad or sorry, but the attitude seemed to speak of dejection, and a closed book lay on her knee; and as he drew nearer, he saw that she was pale, the corners of her mouth drooping sorrowfully, as if her thoughts were sadder than her loneliness.

He stopped short, suddenly struck by the thought of how lonely she must have been during the past weeks; but her father had been right—she was strong enough to be left to herself; and as Dody had been his mother's child through and through, so this girl had Mr. Eyre's fibre of strength in her, and would rally from a blow that would have slain her mother.

She looked up as he approached, and started to her feet, so that he had time to see how pale she was before

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the joyous colour rushed into her cheeks, then out again, leaving them paler than before.

'I am not in trouble,' she said, looking down at him as he stood in the little hollow below; 'did you think I was; or have you brought me bad news?'

He could not play with the agony of question in her eyes, but he saw how she set her lips hard, as against a blow.

'Yes,' he said, though in his heart he knew it was *good*, that for the dead and the living his news was *best*; 'it is of your father . . . he is dead.'

'Dead!' she said, standing straight up, and gazing over his head. '*Dead* . . . father dead . . . Oh, it is impossible! He would have made some sign before he died!'

'His ship was destroyed at sea,' said Major Methuen gently; 'no one was saved, or so the papers say.'

'Is that all?' she said slowly, and looking at him. 'Why, I thought some one had seen his body—had *buried* him—my dear, darling dad . . . but if he has only been lost at sea, he is *safe*. Does not the sea often give up its dead? No, not its dead,' she added, shivering; 'I mean those who have been *thought* to be dead; and there are boats, and he could swim . . .'

'The ship was burnt to the very water's edge,' said Major Methuen sadly, for he had read the latest details. 'She showed a sheet of flame against a black sky, but every soul on board was dead when help reached her.'

'How do you know that my father was on board?' she said, still with that pale strength of regard, that tearless look. 'He may not have gone with the ship all the way. Was it homeward or outward bound when—when this happened?'

'Homeward. Your father booked his passage out and

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back in it, and in the course of another fourteen days should have been here.'

'That is true,' she said, trembling; 'for I have been counting the days . . . but it is not true!' she cried, with the first ring of passion in her voice that he had yet heard. 'He loved me, and I him . . . on which day did it happen?' she said, turning to him quickly; 'for I must have *known* it—got some *sign*——'

'It was on Monday, at sundown,' he said, 'immediately before a violent storm at sea.'

'And on Monday I was *happy*,' she said; 'happier than I have been since he went away. I was thinking of you and of him all day, and I fell asleep here at sundown, and dreamed that I had joined your hands together across the cowslip-gate.'

The man before her groaned and turned away . . . had not her maiden dreams fulfilled themselves, and might he not go through the cowslip-gate now as often as he listed, while to *her*, was not the dead for ever shrined in her heart, the human idol that in life must have fallen shattered at her feet?

'*He lives!*' she cried, and the triumphant joy of her voice startled him as he turned to look at her, the colour in her cheek, the light in her eye, the look of faith as strongly stamped on her features as it had been on Job's in those days before he found his salvation; 'but do you not *wish* him to live?' she said suddenly; 'do you—God forgive you—wish him *dead?*'

He looked at her without a word, his face growing stern as he looked.

Did he wish his enemy dead? Did he see happiness for himself and her beyond Mr. Eyre's death, the gates of Paradise opening to him who had so long stood starved and lonely without?

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In his heart he knew he had been saying, 'Please God, it is true,' ever since he heard the news; but now—now——

'Is he the first and the best in all the world to you, Madcap?'

'The first and the best,' she said, with the first falter that had come into her voice; 'he will always be the first and the best in the whole world to me!'

'Then please God he lives,' he said slowly, as he turned away, looking out with blind eyes at the sunny glades, the cool shadows beyond, of the dead man's kingdom.

'He can swim *miles*,' said the girl, a little restlessly; 'and there are desert islands, are there not, at sea?'

Major Methuen shuddered—perhaps at the thought of a man being so cast away—perhaps thinking a lost soul in hell could not suffer such torture as must be Mr. Eyre's portion, living solitary with such a secret as he held locked in his breast for sole company by night and day.

Something in his averted look, his attitude, perhaps the fear against which she had so stubbornly fought, suddenly pierced her, and she stepped noiselessly to her old seat, her face to the tree, all her high courage gone at a breath.

So he saw her when he turned, and thought her unconscious, as he had seen her mother once, in a short sharp season of bitter misery; and his voice was harsh with pain as he kneeled beside her, crying out, under his breath:

'Oh, my little one—my dear, my dear! . . .'

She heard him, and turned.

'Why do you pity me?' she said. 'Do not do that till we are sure that he is dead . . . then you may pity

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me, as you might have pitied my mother if she had lost him.'

A feeling of powerlessness overcame the man who heard her.

Here was the staunch devotion of the older Madcap over again, that Mr. Eyre himself alone could break, or that higher Power who

> 'Keeps a niche
> In Heaven to hold our idols . . . albeit
> He brake them to our faces, and denied
> That our close kisses should impair their white.'

'How long shall I have to wait before there is a message from him?' she said, standing up. 'If it will be more than a few days, I cannot bear it . . . but he will be as quick as he can . . .'

Her eyes wandered around, and she seemed for a moment or two to listen to the frivolous interruptions that had at intervals crossed her misery during the past minutes, the hum of insects, the bird-cries, the low multitudinous sounds that swell the forest life.

Then suddenly she stretched out her hands, and trembled in every limb.

'*If* it is true,' she said; 'father . . . father . . . and it is through your care and love I am living now . . . always loving, always good . . . Oh, dad . . . dad . . .'

'There, cry,' said Major Methuen, as the slow tears dropped through her fingers. 'Cry as hard as you can, my poor, poor little soul!'

'No,' she said, looking up; 'I will not. It is like making *sure* that he is dead . . . if—if—but I will not think of it. And there is Doune to comfort . . . he will be sorry now that he did not love him *more* . . .

'But it was kind of you to come and tell me,' she

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added, looking at her companion as if from a great way off; 'only I do not feel that you are sorry about father; and you might forgive him, now that you think he is dead . . .'

For a while he did not answer her; then he said slowly, as one out of whom the words are wrung:

'If my wishing could bring him back, he should be here; if the sacrifice of my life could make your happiness, Madcap, I would give it—for your mother's sake and yours, since neither of you could live without him, and he must always be first and best in two such faithful hearts.'

'Yes,' said the girl, 'always the first—always the best. And now I am going home—home!' She shivered as she repeated the word. 'As if it could be that without him . . . it will be all dreary and empty till he comes back' (she had stepped down into the hollow, and was walking swiftly); 'and if the boys come to-day, they must not stay—it would torment me to see them watching and listening for every sound, and I would rather meet him all alone . . . no one on earth can love him as well as I do.'

They went nearly in silence the rest of the way; but when they reached the cowslip-gate she stopped, and held out her hand.

'Good-bye,' she said; 'grief has made me very selfish—but I am grateful to you, all the same,' and went quickly through the gate into the light beyond, leaving him alone in the shadows, yet with the pulse of a passionate new hope and life stirring him to his inmost fibre, as he watched that slender shape disappearing in the distance.

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CHAPTER IX.

'I have lost the sound child sleeping,
Which the thunder could not break;
Something, too, of the strong leaping
Of the stag-like heart awake. . . .'

DOUNE, with wet towels round his head, was 'sporting his oak' on the day of Madcap's trouble, and would not have opened his door if every don in Oxford had thundered for admission; while Gordon had been on the river since daybreak, returning only to eat and turn in to those blessed slumbers that never (save when he thought overlong of Madcap) failed him.

But next morning they heard the news, and started at once for Lovel, where they found Madcap in her usual white gown and a white flower in her belt, and whiter roses yet on her cheeks, reading quietly in Mr. Eyre's study.

'He is not dead,' she said, as they both flew to her, and Doune kissed her mouth and Gordon her cheek, while the four strong young arms went round her as though she were a baby, instead of something infinitely stronger than either of them; 'and you must not spoil your studies,' she said to Doune, as she kissed him; 'so you and Gordon will go back to-morrow, and I will stay quietly here, and wait for Dad.'

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In vain Gordon pleaded to be allowed to go to the Towers, and be within call until some more certain information of Mr. Eyre was forthcoming; in vain Doune, whose stubborn heart was at last vanquished, and who now knew how truly and sincerely his father had won him, refused to return to his beloved books; at the end of two days Madcap got her way, and sent them back for the remaining fortnight of the term.

Perhaps her faith had infected them both, perhaps she had been kinder to Gordon than she had ever been before; but the hearts of both young men were lighter as they departed than when they came; and, if pale, Madcap showed no signs of sadness as she stood on the station platform to see them go.

'And not a bit of black on her!' said the villagers, as she drove back through Lovel, her favourite gray pony, Tommy, flying before the wind, as was his wont, though he had the sense of a Christian, and would dance sedately downhill like any circus wonder, never doing his mistress any worse trick than to tear her gloves into ribbons when she tried to check his pace on level or uphill ground.

But, fast as he flew, she had time to see at the entrance to Synge Lane a man and woman standing, so absorbed in talk that one at least did not see her as she passed by.

She knew the man at a glance, though his back was towards her; but the woman, who looked up, was a stranger—dark, blue-eyed, raven-haired, olive-complexioned, though her lips were red—a face to haunt one by reason of its beauty, and the history that it carried.

Madcap saw the whole scene in a flash, but she did not see how the woman started, and went pale as death as she passed, as one to whom a ghost appears in broad sunshine.

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Madcap had unconsciously coloured as she went by, but, though she pulled up once or twice before she reached the Red Hall, she asked the villagers no questions as to what strangers were sojourning in Lovel.

She thought they looked at her oddly, and with a furtive excitement that she did not understand; but glances counted for little with her in this curious phase of her young life, in which she seemed to walk as in a twilight where none lived, yet whence none had departed, and she might cling with human love, yet *remember* with that reverence which makes a saint of the humblest dead.

In these days she felt none of that longing for human companionship and voices that had lately tormented her; she would sit for hours in her father's study, or stand before her mother's portrait, and study his character from her looks; she even learned the face of Lady Sara Villiers, the evil genius (as she had once accidentally heard) of the family, but found in the dark glowing face not one tithe of the beauty of that living flesh and blood one she had seen beside Major Methuen in the village.

She never went to the cowslip-gate now—never went beyond sight of the house-door; for how if her father should come back, and find none to welcome him?

Day by day he grew dearer in her eyes . . . he was so faithful, he had loved her mother so dearly; and this stranger to whom her heart had so gone out, who had loved her mother too, was lingering in the village because he had met with an old sweetheart, or perhaps had found a new one.

She had told neither Doune nor Gordon of this stranger; for why should she—or, again, why not? There was not a trait of deceit in her; but here a curious reticence

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asserted itself, and since no questions were asked, she volunteered no replies.

But one day very early in July a telegram was brought to her in an envelope of the usual colour.

'It is from father' she said aloud, and opened it with a firm hand.

It was from Mr. Eyre, dated Paris, and bade her expect him home on the evening of the following day. For awhile she sat quite still—did ever the ease that follows the rolling away of the stone from a human heart equal the past misery inflicted by its weight? Then she said:

'You will prepare everything for your master, Saunders, for he will be here to-morrow;' and ran out to be alone with her great joy.

Her feet took her along the familiar path without her bidding; it was only when she reached the cowslip-gate that she remembered how long it was since she had been there . . . but she was now carried beyond herself, lifted into that kind of exultation which follows on the granting in full the one supreme prayer of a human soul, and when she looked up and saw Major Methuen on the other side, it seemed to her natural enough that he should be there.

'Do you know it already?' she said eagerly; 'have you heard it in the village—that he will be home *to-morrow?*'

He neither spoke nor moved; he could not keep out the darkness from his eyes, the grayness that stole over his features, as he said:

'Thank God!—for you.'

She had passed through the cowslip-gate as she spoke, and it had closed behind her, for ever shutting him out from his kingdom, though she stood beside him, and

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some glimmering of the grief, the loss, the utter shipwreck to which his life had come, reached her soul as she looked at him, and stretched out a gentle hand in token of friendship.

He took it silently, looking down on it. A minute ago how near it was, and now how far away!

'Good-bye,' he said; 'I have wished you more than one false good-bye, Madcap; but this is a real one.'

He kissed her hand, but when he let it go, was there a tear upon it, or had one fallen from her own eyes as she looked up to find herself alone?

Long she stood and gazed at it, gazed till the memory of the man was woven in her heart for ever, till, in the long years in which she saw him not, the thought of him was to her as

'A bower in which to sleep,
Full of soft dreams and health, and quiet breathing.'

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BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

'Whatever my mood is,
I love Piccadilly.'

THE tulips were all in full blow between Grosvenor and Stanhope Gates—the haughty yellow, the imperial scarlet, the pink, the white, the rose-red; here a bed of pale young beauties opening their mauve shirts to show pink satin slips within, there a fair army of white and rose, whose mingled hues showed more daintily than those concentrated masses of colour which seemed to dazzle the eye as it gazed.

'Look!' cried the girl who sat on the box-seat of a coach that a handsome young man was tooling past the flower-beds; 'that is the prettiest sight I have seen in London yet!'

'They get them up very well here, don't they?' said the young man, not taking his eyes off his horses, for though early in the season, the Park was rather full, and he had no intention of 'spilling' the precious personage who sat beside him, to say nothing of the duenna and servants who sat behind.

'Yes,' said the girl, looking at him indignantly, 'that is

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just it—they are *too* well got up—they won't bow to the wind, or tremble to the rain, and they are not worth any one of my wild flowers at home!'

'That's right,' said the young man heartily, but without looking at her; 'I like to hear you say that. To be sure, there *is* no place like home; and I shall be glad enough to settle down there when this confounded season is over.'

The girl did not answer; her eyes were fixed on the wind-swept, budding trees, for there had been a storm over-night, and the wind had done more than the rain in freshening, clearing, and making sweet the air that almost smelled of country this morning, and partly made her understand how, even in a city, spring must be beautiful.

'Who is the girl?' said one male gossip to another, and looked at the coach, now, for a moment or so, checked by a crowd of equestrians passing into the Row.

'Eyre's daughter,' said the other; 'the man who was said to have murdered his wife.'

'Didn't he? And who's the man?'

'Lord Lovel of Lovel.'

'She is well turned out,' said the second gossip, looking at her from head to heel; 'and *he* is good form—very; so is the coach; chestnuts matched to a hair; and *her* colour; and the servants' liveries, too, admirably chosen. He has large estates?'

'Yes; out of all proportion to his income. The late Lord Lovel was once engaged to the girl's mother, and left Eyre's daughter all his personal estate—amounting to about ten thousand a year. And, of course, the young pair are engaged.'

'Of course. But she'll soon lose that look, eh? Evi-

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dently doesn't know a soul. Fancy looking at tree-tops in the Park!'

'She can afford to; such a face as that will make men climb to look at it. She needn't look down.'

'Poetical, by Jove!'

'Yes; I knew her mother. Eyre would make her go through a London season, just to disgust her with human nature, I suppose, till she begged him to take her home. Even her children couldn't console her, and he never brought her again. She preferred hearts and homes to society and houses. And the daughter is her living image,' added the man, as the coach moved on; 'and Eyre himself has aged very little in seventeen years.'

'Gone into Parliament, hasn't he? Makes the House listen when he speaks?'

'He always did—not the House, but people. And his son is more brilliant still; likely to do some harm in his time, or die in a madhouse.'

'Is there insanity in the family?'

'No; but eccentricity to the last degree. The Villiers strain brought it in; but perhaps it's wearing out.'

'Surely that's Methuen?'

'Yes, with his mother. First time I ever saw him here.'

'Awkward fellow that; forgets all his old friends, and makes no new ones. Hates to be mistaken for the late Lord Lovel—a little touched, eh? He seems to know Eyre's daughter; he raised his hat to her as she passed.'

'Very likely. Lovel and Methuen fought together in the Crimea; joined at the last moment, and Lovel was killed.'

'And who has Eyre got as sheep-dog?'

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'Didn't you see her? Lady Ann Lovel—the boy's great-aunt.'

The other man grimaced.

'Not such a bad choice. She can still climb a coach without looking ridiculous, and has the quietest tongue and the profoundest experience in London. No fear of the golden apples being seized with such an Hesperides to keep guard. So Eyre wishes the match?'

'He buried his heart in his wife's grave; a daughter's well enough, but she's not a wife.'

'He won't marry again?'

'Not he—the Duchess of Marmiton couldn't persuade him; and if she couldn't, no one else will.'

'So that's why she still mourns the Duke?'

'To be sure. Eyre was a devil of a fellow among the women at one time, and he made a fool of her among the rest—but he is invulnerable now.'

'Having lost his power of charming?' said the other man.

'Not he. Ask the Duchess.'

'She means to introduce the girl?'

'No doubt. But where's the good? She is her mother over again—she will run away from all the finery, and marry that handsome young fellow in a village church.'

'But her mother married an old one?'

'Yes—worse luck for her.'

'The Honourable Nancy looks very fit to-day,' said the other gossip, exhausted by a subject that he had only so long pursued because Madcap's face had charmed him.

'Yes—Lovel's first cousin—he might do worse than marry *her*, if Eyre's daughter throws him over.'

Meanwhile Madcap sat excited, with shining eyes, and

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longed to ask Gordon to turn his horses' heads that she might get another glimpse of the man whom she had not seen for three years, and who had long ago passed into her memory as a friend.

And he had remembered her, though she must have altered, surely, and he had saluted her.

How lucky that Gordon did not see him; for how could she excuse the silence she had preserved about him all this time? What could she say if she met him in society one day when she was with her father, and he approached her?

But she felt that she did not care, she was so happy, so *happy* to see him once again; and her voice startled Gordon with its joy as at Victoria Gate she begged him to go back and draw up for a little while, because she wished to look at the people as they went by.

'But I thought you wanted to drive some way out,' said Gordon, considerably astonished at her change of mind; and he turned to find her radiant as in her wildest days, and looking so bewitching that not even the unbecoming altitude at which she sat could spoil her, or check the murmur of admiration that presently ran along the idlers who hung about the rails, or moved to and fro.

But it was early yet, not one o'clock, the Eyres having brought their country habits with them to town; so that usually they rode before breakfast, and drove before luncheon, and, as far as possible, lived their usual lives in the midst of unusual surroundings.

But if Lady Ann, as a fashionable woman, sometimes felt ridiculous at appearing so unseasonably, she was satisfied to see Madcap entirely indifferent to society and admiration, and happy only with her family and Gordon.

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To be sure, there had scarcely been time for a new lover to appear on the horizon, but with the engagement between the young pair tacitly understood everywhere, there was little chance of any suitor showing himself bold enough to enter the lists against the established lover.

'Who was that gentleman who raised his hat to you, my dear?' said the faithful sheep-dog presently, while Gordon was leaning over to speak to a friend below.

'What gentleman?' said Madcap, looking away. 'I have seen more than one man that I danced with last night.'

Yet Lady Ann wondered what had brought such new life and colour into the girl's face, and resolved to keep her eyes well open for the future.

But as gradually the Park filled with its smart morning ranks of folk on foot, Madcap grew suddenly tired of it all, and begged Gordon to take her down past Holland Park, as they had intended to do on starting.

'And to-morrow morning we will walk in the Park,' she said restlessly, as they went bowling down the almost deserted drive. 'One cannot *speak* to anyone up here; and we are sure to meet some one or other that we know, are we not?'

'Are you in such a hurry to meet your partners again?' said Gordon, a shade on his brow; 'and you made fun enough of them, too, coming home.'

'Yes,' said Madcap, 'so I did; and I think it very ridiculous that one may not pick and choose one's own partners——'

'A pretty state of things it would be, if introductions were done away with,' said Gordon, in high disdain.

'Do you think so?' said Madcap, with spirit. 'Now, if I were a great lady I would print "*sans introduction*."

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on all my ball-cards, and leave the guests to please their taste in the choice of partners—to choose the prettiest, the wittiest, or the one that he liked best! Think what conversations one might have getting upstairs—what groans one might exchange over the heat—what home-truths one might hear of one's self—what odd lights on prominent subjects one might gather—even learn the name of some of the celebrities with whom one rubbed elbows—perhaps persons whom one has longed to see all one's life, but who look just like everybody else after all!'

'It would never answer, Madcap,' said Gordon. 'No decent man or woman was ever picked up without a proper introduction.'

'Was she not?' said Madcap, her eyes resting on the brown trees just ruffled with green in Kensington Gardens. 'But to continue: I have an idea about the celebrities. Why should not a famous woman carry her name emblazoned on her fan, and a man *his* on the inside of his opera-hat?'

'Why not come as sandwich men and women at once?' said Gordon drily.

'Or, better still, for the hostess to have a panel in the wall that is illuminated by a famous name in its owner's presence, and goes out when he departs?'

'Like Willing's advertisements on the underground,' said Gordon, intent on his horses, for by now they had turned homewards. 'No, no, Madcap. There are rules about these things, and if you broke them, you would only be misunderstood——'

'Would a man misunderstand a child if she were friendly with him, even though she had never had the shibboleth of introduction mumbled over her?' said Madcap, with her head turned away.

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'But you are *not* a child,' said Gordon. 'You are grown up now—thank Heaven! And so am I. And what do you want with strangers, dear? You've got *us*.'

'Yes,' she said; 'but father is away so much. So is Doune; while you are quite happy with your team——'

'I only had it to please you,' said Gordon, colouring with disappointment, 'because you said you could not live in town without fresh air; and I thought I would drive you out somewhere every day.'

'That is true,' she said gently. 'But I am tired and cross, Geordie; and I would like to fall asleep this minute, and wake up in the woods, with no balls or fine London ways to worry me!'

'It will soon be over,' said the young man. 'And your father would have it so. But cheer up. You will never be asked to come up a second time!'

'I shall come every year that father wishes it,' she said coldly; 'but it will not be for long. You know he only went into Parliament to nurse the seat for Doune, who will be old enough to take it within a very few years.'

'He went into the House to please himself,' said Gordon, as he turned his chestnuts homeward; 'he never could settle down, and he never *will*, since he took that journey three years ago.'

'He loves me just the same,' said Madcap proudly, though tears were in her eyes; 'and it is not likely that he would be satisfied with the quiet life that suits boys —and a girl.'

She looked at one of the 'boys' as she said it, and saw a young man of the best type of muscular English manhood, and dressed so that one was as ignorant of his clothes as an aborigine is of *his*—and felt the pleasure of seeing him exactly right in every particular, from

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the body that his clothes fitted, upwards to the glance that every Lovel claimed as his birthright.

But her eyes were cold as she looked at him—how like he was to those other men that she met at every step in New Bond Street (while a beautiful woman or girl came as far between as a pearl in a shipload of oysters); but never had she seen the fellow to the seamed, sunburnt face that, three years hidden from her, she had seen in the Park that day.

A few people had recognised Madcap, when Gordon drove past, as the lovely young *débutante* introduced to London society by the Duchess of Marmiton over-night; but a great many who knew her mother's story were on the look-out for her as she came back, her wistful eyes wandering to and fro among the faces below, as if she were seeking what she could not find.

Was she happy? the curious asked, as they looked at her, young, with the downy cheeks of a child, and the beauty of a woman—the mistress of ten thousand a year, and engaged to one of the handsomest young fellows in town, and her neighbour in the country, Lord Lovel.

The women picked her to pieces because they could not forgive her for being as perfectly turned out as her equipage, for, of course, they said, she furnished it, since Lord Lovel was so poor; and thus Gordon's sole extravagance that season, and for which he denied himself things that other men took as a matter of course, was turned into an occasion of reproach to him, as he accidentally found out later.

His heart was heavy enough when he drew up at Curzon Street, for to-day it seemed that less than ever he had been able to please Madcap; but Mr. Eyre, who happened to be in the dining-room and looking out,

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thought he had seldom seen a prettier sight than the drag as it came down the street, the sun shining on the harness and the horses' satin coats, with the two handsome young faces behind them to complete the picture.

She saw him standing there, and when the coach stopped, descended from it at the risk of her neck, and flew to the dining-room; but he had retreated to the library, and was sitting at his table when she reached him.

'Oh, father!' she cried, 'why didn't you come with us? *You* could have driven, and Gordon sat behind with Lady Ann!'

He laughed in spite of himself, but looked at her keenly, and wondered if the mere first whiff of a London season had intoxicated and made her frivolous.

'Haven't you got room for me on your knee?' she said reproachfully, as he pushed some books from the chair nearest to him. 'I am not so *very* much heavier than I used to be, if I *am* obliged to be grown up!'

'Don't you like it?' he said, looking her carefully over as she perched herself on the desired vantage-ground. 'Your dress becomes you; you have more style, if you have less beauty, than your mother; and you seem very happy——'

'So I am *now*,' she said, with a sigh of satisfaction; 'but, do you know, this is my fifth day in town, and here is the first real chance I've had of a talk with you?'

He shook his head, and thought of the lover; for here was the mischief of it, and one of those dark shades to Mr. Eyre's character: that from the moment he had contemplated his daughter as Gordon's wife, possibly loving Gordon *best* in the end, the close link between

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himself and her was virtually severed, and insensibly she receded in his thoughts to make room for the other Madcap . . . since, though some one was bound to steal his daughter, no living man could have stolen from him his wife.

'No—no,' he said; 'your place is out in the sunshine, and you look very well there; and you must not tire of Gordon's company thus early, child, for you have far enough to ride with him yet.'

'I would rather walk in the mud beside *you*,' she said, with an arm round his neck, and her cool cheek to his. 'And why must you turn me out, father? why are you so set on my marrying Gordon—or anybody?'

'It is a woman's lot to marry,' said Mr. Eyre, haggling over the words that his wife would have known so well how to say to her young daughter; 'and I am growing old——'

'I wish Gordon would get a touch of the same complaint!' said Madcap, tears and rueful laughter struggling together in her eyes. 'He *says* he gets older with every year, but I can't see the least signs of improvement!'—which was true enough; but neither could Gordon find any in *her*.

If in summer he asked her to be his wife, she said she hated being worried in warm weather, and he could ask her again in autumn; and when autumn came, she said Christmas was the time for asking questions of that sort; though when Christmas arrived, she recommended his waiting till Valentine's Day, yet found no satisfactory reply to give him then. Yet, half a loaf being better than no bread, he waited on her caprices patiently.

Once he asked her if there were anybody else—if accidentally she had met some other man who had cut him out, and if he knew his name?

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And to this she had answered truly enough, 'There is no name;' for a girl has no name, spoken or thought, for the man who has, whether consciously or unconsciously, won her heart.

Perhaps Mr. Eyre, supposing the end inevitable, had resolved to bring matters to a climax by throwing the young people together under novel conditions in town; but, at any rate, he had moved his household thither early this spring, to Doune's amazement and Gordon's profound disgust.

But to-day — to-day — what had happened to the girl?

Mr. Eyre seemed to see his wife, as she had looked under the influence of love for *him*, in this daughter whose eyes had deepened and darkened during the morning's drive; and if not for Gordon, then, of course, for some partner at the assembly over-night.

He had not thought her made of such inflammable stuff, and looked at her coldly as he asked how she had enjoyed her first ball.

'It was overcrowded,' she said, 'and the flowers you gave me withered directly; but the Duchess was very kind—and the men were all alike, though I fancied I recognised one or two of them in the Park to-day.'

'So you prefer no one to Gordon?' said Mr. Eyre, a little impatiently. 'And that's natural enough; you have everything in common—your country pursuits, open-air life, tastes, age, good looks.'

'And how about our *hearts?*' said Madcap, retreating so far to the verge of her father's knee as to be in danger of falling off; 'it takes two to make a bargain, does it not, even in love?'

'Your mother and I made none,' he said, thinking of

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how, without a doubt or a fear, his true-love had fled to his arms as her haven.

'But she loved you,' said Madcap softly 'not her other lovers.'

'And what do you know of your mother's lovers?' said Mr. Eyre sternly; and for the first time in her life she realized how terrible he could look in his wrath.

'Lord Lovel loved my mother,' she said; 'and she loved you—that was all.'

'And perhaps, after all, she had done better to love *him*,' said Mr. Eyre, setting his daughter down, and walking restlessly to and fro. 'But I'll have you exposed to no such chances, child, for you might not come off so well, and that wretched fortune of yours would make you the quarry of every titled beggar in town, but for your supposed engagement to Lovel. And I think you are not treating him well—in short, ungratefully——'

'Why should I be grateful to him for loving me more than I wish?' said Madcap sadly. 'Does any girl ever willingly leave her father, her home, *everything*, to go away with a young man just because he asks her? I cannot understand it.'

And this was true . . . no inward teaching had yet come to the girl to make such departure the most natural, beautiful thing in the world.

Mr. Eyre stopped to look at her, and his face softened—he held out his arms, and she ran into them.

'You shall not go till you are *willing*,' he said. 'God knows I don't want to lose you, though I have been staring that fact in the face these two years; but blame yourself if Gordon falls in love with some one else one of these days——'

'If *only* he would!' said Madcap, brilliant satisfaction

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lighting up her face at the idea, 'and leave you and me to be happy together!'

Mr. Eyre pinched her cheek, and asked if he and she did not dine out together that night.

'To be sure,' said Madcap, jumping for joy; 'and without the sheep-dog,' she added in a cautious whisper, as she looked round. 'Oh, Dad! *why* need I have had one?'

'Does she worry you?' said Mr. Eyre. 'I chose her for her silence; and remember, child, that though the Duchess and she may dress, shoe, metamorphose your body as they please (within certain limits), I expect them to leave your manners as they found them. And how do you like the Duchess?'

'I don't know; I have only seen her twice.'

'That's right; always reserve your judgment. But she is a good, faithful sort of woman, and means well; and since you *must* see life a little, you may as well do so under good auspices.'

'But why *must* I, father?' said Madcap.

'Ah, why?' he said. 'Perhaps I want to make you in love with the country. Perhaps I can't live in town without you. I shall be a little anxious about you to-night, as the party is a small one, and your conversation will be remarked. But you can't do wrong if you forget all about yourself, your face, and your gown. Remember, there are twelve hours in which you can *think* about yourself; in the other twelve do not talk of it. And you are too young to be expected to start topics, so you must cultivate listening, and you will soon have the best talkers at your service. Then you must not lay yourself out for attraction. You are not a shop, to put all your best thoughts and graces for sale in the window; keep them for home, where they will be most valued. There's

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the luncheon-bell, and I think I heard the duenna and Doune come in just now.'

'Here is Gordon's only rival,' thought Lady Ann, as Madcap came laughing into the room on her father's arm; and she smiled, not ill-pleased that there should be only such an one in the field.

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CHAPTER II.

'So nimble and so full of subtile flame,
As if that every one from whom they came
Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,
And had resolved to live a fool the rest
Of his dull life.'

THE library clock had struck a quarter to eight, and Mr. Eyre looked up a little impatiently, wondering what detained Madcap.

His heart was full of her that day; and for the first time since he sailed away in the *Arizona*, the link between him and his daughter was knit close as in her childish days, while satisfaction at holding the first place in her heart extinguished his regrets for the young lover's disappointment.

For the first time since that Sunday when he had seemed to wake from a dream, he felt something of the old peace that had preceded his awakening, and was already thinking of the country and those peaceful pursuits that had lost their charm for him since his return from that fruitless journey upon which he had set out on the ill-starred sailing-ship *Arizona*.

He had never meant to return by her, and, intent on following up clue after clue of Hester Clarke, did not for days hear of the catastrophe that had pierced Madcap's

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heart, and even then he was thinking less of his daughter than of the woman whom he believed to have tracked to her hiding-place at last.

But the thread broke in his hands; so that once more he turned homewards with despair in his heart, and still that stubborn resolve to wrest truth from the dead or the living yet.

Meanwhile, he threw himself into the exercise of his brain; and when, six months after his return, he was asked to stand as Conservative member for Marmiton, he consented; and, being duly returned, might have become a shining light in the House had he so willed.

But very quickly he wearied of such legalized school-boy antics as he witnessed each day; and, not caring to accept office under the Government of that period, did not trouble to exert the powerful influence he possessed; and while he spoke but rarely, was regarded as a man who eschewed brilliancy, and preferred to husband his talents rather than display them.

For two years he endured at intervals the solitude of a town house unbrightened by young steps and voices; but in the third he called up Madcap, and established her delightfully: for Mr. Eyre was rich, in so far that he was not one of those who live to-day by the light of to-morrow, and he could afford to give his daughter all those fripperies and delicacies of surrounding that set off a young maid to so much advantage.

And she had joined him eagerly, gladly, for, like her father, she seemed to have wearied of the peaceful life that once had so profoundly contented her; yet now that she was away from it, her heart was restless still—or had been till that morning.

Presently Mr. Eyre looked up to see her standing near him, satin-shod, gazing at him with those eyes of love

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that have no copy; and as he glanced her over carefully, he saw that Mrs. Mason's taste had not betrayed the girl . . . for here was a morning face above a primrose gown, edged with pearls, and choicer ones about her neck and arms, and in her hands a curious fan, made of white flowers, that he had himself ordered for her that morning.

'Have I kept you waiting, father?' she said; 'but I have been standing here some minutes, though you did not see me.'

Something of his lost happiness, his lost future, seemed to come back to him as he went forward and kissed her, then led her to the brougham that had been one of his extravagances for her; for, desiring that 'beauty should go beautifully,' he had ordered the inside fittings of the carriage to be of white satin—the finest setting of all for a young girl's face.

Many people looked at the two as they passed down Piccadilly, thinking Madcap must be wife to the brilliant-eyed middle-aged man by whom she sat, so joyous she looked, and so entirely was she engrossed by his conversation.

They had almost reached their destination—Whitehall—when a check came in their progress, and the jar of opposing wheels made Madcap look up startled, to see that their carriage had become locked with a hansom going in the contrary direction, and with a bound of the heart, a sinking of her pulse, and a sudden ebbing away of the blood from her face, saw that the occupant of the hansom was Major Methuen.

He was looking full at her—at the attitude of father and daughter as they sat side by side in that white nest, Mr. Eyre's ungloved hand in her two slender ones—his eyes in one flash taking in every detail of her loveliness; then they left her to meet those of Mr. Eyre in a light-

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ning-glance of recognition that made the latter spring forward with a fierce, choked cry of—'*Frank!*'

But on the instant the wheels unlocked, the horses sprang forward; before Mr. Eyre could recover from the kind of horror in which he was plunged, the carriage and the hansom were three hundred yards apart.

He pulled the check-string like a madman. For the first time in her life Madcap saw him thrown completely off his balance, and trembled as he bade the coachman turn and drive back for his life, himself leaning out of the window as they thundered up St. James's Street; but in every hansom they overtook he searched in vain for the face that had startled him.

Madcap sat pale and cold.

What did it all mean? Why had not Major Methuen acknowledged her, and what meant that extraordinary look which she had intercepted on its way to her father?

And now came the firstfruits of the deceit she had practised towards her people in never speaking of her acquaintance with Lord Lovel's friend; and she dreaded the moment when Mr. Eyre should turn to face her.

Common-sense made him abandon a mad pursuit in a very few minutes; and when they were once more approaching their destination Mr. Eyre sat down, and turned to Madcap.

'Have I frightened you, child?' he said. 'But I've seen a ghost—Frank's ghost—fifteen years older than when I saw him last, in his coffin; but those were his eyes, and he *recognised* me. Surely I'm not going mad—and it *can't* be a chance resemblance—don't I know his face by heart?'

'But if he had known you? Oh, what am I saying?' said Madcap; 'how could a ghost *bow* to one? It must be some curious resemblance;' she blushed and looked

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away. 'Gordon says there are numbers of men in town who have their doubles, and are constantly mistaken for one another, even hear all each other's secrets, and are made love to by proxy!'

The carriage stopped at that moment, and Mr. Eyre was his usual self as he took her into the house; but very early during dinner he asked his hostess if she had ever met a man in town exactly like the late Lord Lovel.

She had not; but as the party, though small, included the inevitable diner-out whose memory constituted his living, Mr. Eyre was soon informed that Frank's *doppelgänger* was a certain Major Methuen, who, curiously enough, had been his friend, and fought beside him in the Crimea.

'Methuen!' exclaimed Mr. Eyre, thinking of a letter he had received years ago. 'What is his club?' he added.

'Naval and Military; but he rarely shows there. Hates to be spoken to; got a little touched in the head through sunstroke in India, and won't answer if by mistake anyone addresses him as "Lovel."'

'I shall try and find him to-morrow,' said Mr. Eyre carelessly; and the subject dropped.

Madcap heard all, and grew pale; for what could this meeting between the two men bring about but trouble? And yet, if the antipathy felt by Major Methuen were due to his friendship for Lord Lovel and his being a little 'touched,' might not her father and he come to some such good understanding as might bring *him* into her life again?

That Mr. Eyre did not shrink from meeting him, and was ignorant of having done him any injury, was clear. If at first he had been startled by the extraordinary resemblance to Lord Lovel, there had been no sign of *fear* in his face, and as the evening passed, never had his

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spirits seemed better, or his wit more brilliant, seeming to summon forth all that was brightest in each person present.

As they drove home Mr. Eyre said:

'You have always wanted to see Frank, child; well, you have seen him to-day—as he would have been if he lived. But it has given me a queer turn—almost as if I had died, and come back as a ghost to find a stranger strutting in my image. But why, if that was Methuen, he should look at me as if I were his enemy, God knows; unless, being Frank's friend, he has taken up his quarrels.'

'Did you quarrel with Lord Lovel, father?' said Madcap, trembling.

'Not I; but he behaved ill to me, and would never come to any explanation—though two minutes face to face would have put an end to the misunderstanding. Perhaps Methuen has the key to the riddle' (Madcap started at the excited note in her father's voice); 'if so, I'll borrow or steal it.'

So there had been only a misunderstanding between her father and Lord Lovel, and two such men as Mr. Eyre and Lancelot must understand each other when they met, thought Madcap, though still cast down by thoughts of her deceit. And surely, if only for the sake of his child-friend, for her likeness to that other Madcap he had known and loved, this man would bury the hatchet, and make friends.

And through all her thoughts ran the lilt of an old song, that seemed to sing in at her ears and heart:

'And will I see his face again?
And will I hear him speak?
I'm downright dizzy wi' the thocht;
In troth I'm like to greet.'

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CHAPTER III.

'O cam' you by yon water-side?
Pu'd ye the rose or lily?
Or cam' ye by yon meadow green;
Or saw ye my sweet Willie?'

'MADCAP!' exclaimed Doune, as, coming quickly into the breakfast-room, he found his sister there alone; 'what are you doing here so early? I thought you and Lady Ann never rose till nine?'

'Then you thought wrong,' said Madcap, turning a shoulder, not a cheek, to Doune's offered kiss; 'though, to be sure, I wonder you took the trouble to think at all on the subject!'

'Have I neglected you, Madcap?' said the young fellow remorsefully; 'but you see, I have never stayed in town before; and there is so much to interest one, and I like to hear father speak——'

'But you never listen to *me*!' said Madcap, who had kept a bone to pick with her brother these three years, and now produced it. 'It is always read, read; learn, learn; but no *pouring out*, no passing on of your treasures to other folk. Have you ever thought how utterly selfish, how demoralizing all this reading is?'

'But I have not read at all lately,' said the dark over-brilliant-eyed young man; 'I only look on, and listen——'

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'But why can't you *talk?*' cried Madcap, stamping her foot; 'when I was little, you talked rigmaroles to me by the hour; but when I grew up, and began to get strong and—and *stout*,' she added, glancing at a mirror that showed her slim proportions, 'you took to those wretched books, and never thought of me again!'

'Didn't I?' he said, with something of the old boyish ring of jealousy in his voice; 'well, perhaps I found out long ago that father is first with you, and the rest are nowhere.'

'When did you find that out?' said Madcap, turning round, and showing a very happy face in spite of her wrongs.

'Oh, by bits,' said her brother moodily, as he walked to the other window and looked out; 'but I've learned my lesson somehow, though I did not discover it in my books.'

'And you love me *better* than them?' she said, drawing near.

'And you love *me* as well as father?' said her brother, facing round.

'Yes—only differently.'

'There *was* a time,' said the young man, looking at her with dissatisfied eyes, 'when nothing would induce you to put one of us before the other—"Dad and Doony," you would say, when asked which you liked best; but now——'

'Have I neglected you, dear?' she said, using his own question, as she came close to him and took his long supple hand—the hand of a scholar and a thinker.

'Perhaps,' he said, 'we have both something to blame ourselves with on that score. And every day that I live, I miss my mother more. But that is not your fault; and, to be sure, I neglected you once for Gordon; just

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as now, when father is out of the way, you neglect me for *him*.'

'For Gordon?' she said, as she stood on tiptoe to kiss her brother's cheek. 'Oh, poor Gordon! *Ask* him, and he will tell you if I prefer his company to yours!'

'Poor Gordon indeed!' said Doune, looking at her with some rebuke; 'a better fellow never lived, and if you are going to treat him badly——'

'Come to the Park with us this morning, and see for yourself how I treat him!' said Madcap, feeling happier in her home-treasures than she had done for years; 'and put all those fusty books out of your head, and forget all your first-class honours for the next three months!'

'The honours are easily forgotten,' said Doune, with one of those rare smiles that made him more than ever like his father; 'but I can't forswear my books, Madcap, any more than you could your woods.'

'We will make a compromise,' she said: 'sometimes *you* shall come with me to the woods, and sometimes *I* will look into your books—and so we will be more together than we have been,' added the girl wistfully, as she put both arms round her brother's neck and kissed him with all her heart.

'Ducksy, darling Madcap!' said Doune, reverting to the old terms of childish endearment, as he kissed her back: 'but I shall be glad when we get home again, though London is not half such a bad place after all.'

Madcap thought it was very good, as she stood with Doune's arm round her, smelling the sweet stocks and mignonette that filled the sills of the open window . . . . hard by a band had begun to play, and better too (in her ears) than the Horse Guards had played yesterday in the

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Park; and for the first time she tasted the charm of that throbbing town-life without, while she rejoiced in the home-life within, and stood listening and quite happy till Lady Ann came in, followed by Mr. Eyre.

Both paused on the threshold, and for a second mistook Doune for Gordon, till Madcap looked round, and flew to her father, wishing her duenna 'Good-morning' by the way.

He looked worn and unrested; but her heart must have been hard that morning, for she was in wild spirits all through breakfast, astonishing Saunders, who thought she had taken one of those occasional leaves out of her father's book in which he was 'fey.'

Gordon was lodged in the Albany, and seldom showed at breakfast in Curzon Street; but this morning he made Lady Ann, at least, happy by coming in before they had left the table, and contributing his quota to the brightness and good looks of the assembly.

'What will you do this morning?' he said, when he had reached his Princess, and found her so joyous and kind that his own spirits ran up like quicksilver.

'I shall *walk*,' she said. 'You, Doune, and I—and Lady Ann,' she added, remembering her sheep-dog, with an effort; 'and father will come to us later, when he has got his business over—won't you, Dad?' she added eagerly.

'Yes, child,' he said absently, 'unless I have to hunt for Methuen. But I have got his mother's address, and shall find him, no doubt.'

'*Methuen?*' said Gordon, looking up; 'why, you will never catch him, sir; he is not at home to his oldest friends, and in fact has forgotten them all—for he is cracked.'

'I wish you had half his brains,' thought Madcap,

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longing to box the boy's ears, and sighing for some scar to tone down his beauty, while Mr. Eyre said:

'You have met him—you know him by sight?'

'Yes,' said Gordon, 'he was pointed out to me long ago, as curiously resembling the Lovels—and particularly my cousin Frank. It seems that he is tied to town by his mother's illness. She is bed-ridden, and cannot be moved; but he rarely shows anywhere, and lives like a hermit.'

'Then he will be the more easy to find,' said Mr. Eyre, as he rose and went out.

'What has upset father?' said Doune, looking after him; while Gordon looked at Madcap, and strove to derive auguries of his day's good from her face.

'He is going to pay a morning call,' said Madcap, jumping up and stretching out her arms as though she would like to fly for joy; 'but I must run after him, and tell him where to find us—beside Achilles, I think—he couldn't miss us there;' and she ran out of the room.

The young men laughed, but Lady Ann frowned; she saw trouble ahead, and wore her gravest look, as Gordon presently sat down beside her, and asked if she had received any fresh news of his mother.

'She is coming over in June,' said Lady Ann; 'but your cousin Nancy has already arrived.'

'Why are all the Lovels either Ann or Nancy?' said Madcap, laughing, as she stole between them.

'But I am not a Lovel,' said the elder lady, with dignity; 'I merely married one—it is in my own right that I am Lady Ann.'

'But Duke's daughters or no,' said Madcap slily, 'there is always a Nancy among the Lovels—and perhaps the one you were talking about will suit Gordon!'

She was out at the door before aunt and nephew re-

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covered from this bomb, and had flown upstairs to Nan, who sat as firmly fixed to her 'seam' here as at Lovel, and scarcely looked up as her young mistress rushed in.

Madcap snatched the linen out of the woman's hands and tossed it behind her back; then, as Nan stared, said:

'I am going to walk in the Park this morning, and you are to come down with me and choose my prettiest gown;' whereupon the woman followed, shaking her head with vague forebodings of unsuspected wooers as she went, and ready to find fault with every garment submitted to her inspection.

But when Madcap had made her own choice, and was dressed in a fresh cotton gown, with those minutiæ of a lady's toilette that mark it rigorously respected, Nan admitted that she had never seen her young mistress look better, nor even so well, in those low-necked frocks that had shocked her with their boldness.

'After all,' cried Madcap, an hour later, as, escorted by her two henchmen, she set out for the Park, 'I should not wonder if I ended by liking town very much!'

'God forbid!' thought Gordon; but Doune laughed, and said:

'And I prophesy that in less than a month you will be running away from it, and hiding yourself in the remotest corner of your beloved woods.'

'And if I do,' she said, 'you shall bring one of your beloved books, and we will sit there together, you and I!'

'And how about Gordon?' said Doune, seeing the shade on his friend's face.

'Gordon may come too,' said Madcap, a little unwillingly, as a child who makes a face to itself while it

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gives the kiss to which it is commanded; 'but he will have lots to do looking after the estate!'

She looked up at him with a smile, bright and cold as a January sun, and he had never felt farther away from her as he walked that short step with her to the Park, while *she*, he thought, had never seemed so happy before.

For was not Doune by her side, come back to his old boyish love and care of her? had not her father been *kind* yesterday, and was there not a secret, half-guilty hope in her heart that put new rainbow-tints on everything at which she gazed?

How smart and fresh the women looked in their perfectly made cottons or cambrics—how much more becoming this costly simplicity than the undress worn at sundown!

And all looked their best, and nearly all so happy—as glad as Madcap to shuffle off the coil of winter clothes, and come out in their proper shapes, and smell sweet fresh scents; all eager, too, in laying plans for new pleasures, as if this were their first campaign, and the spring lasted for ever . . . and among the girl-faces Madcap's was the brightest, and attracted the most attention from the lookers-on.

She was already known by sight, and by hearsay celebrated as her father's daughter; and half a dozen male gossips who moved briskly soon finished the business, so that, after half an hour of hard staring at, the young men both longed to beat a retreat.

Each dreaded lest some whisper from these evidently well-informed people should reach her ear, and break her happiness for ever; and for the first time Doune realized how terrible was the risk Mr. Eyre had run in exposing her to the chances of a London season.

For long ago the son had heard the story of his mother's

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death, and one day sought his father, and, with flaming eyes, said:

'They say you killed my mother. *Did* you?'

That interview made father and son firmer friends than before; but this boy, who went through all his agony without a sign to her, trembled for Madcap when she should come to the same bitter knowledge as himself.

'It is unbearably hot,' he said to his sister, after some half-dozen turns, in which Madcap had been more admired, criticised, and envied than any other woman in the Park.

'Hot?' said Madcap, looking up to the scantily-clothed trees overhead, through which the April sun could not shine hard enough to excuse that fine lady's freak, a parasol; 'it is perfectly delightful; and father will be waiting for us beside Achilles presently.'

'He won't come,' said Doune moodily, as he turned once more to see Madcap run the gauntlet of looked and whispered comment; but was forced to smooth his brow, as just then they met Mr. Eyre's Duchess, looking as beautiful in her morning-gown as only a woman can who abhors cosmetics and has stood by her own heart (though mickle dole, much pain it had taught her) for nigh upon a score of years.

Yet at seven-and-thirty she might have tempted almost any man save Mr. Eyre, for love had winnowed her nature, leaving only that better part which writes its mark on a woman's brow and lips for aye: and if she looked at the younger Madcap coldly, seeing her rival here as surely as the older one had been, there was more *heart* in the look than there had been eighteen years ago..

'Father will be here presently,' said Madcap to the

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Duchess; then wondered to see the sudden blush, the brightening eye, and with a jealous pang at her own heart thought, 'She is in love with father!'

But in a moment the blush had vanished, though a joyous look remained; for, in spite of her dozen years of patient waiting since the Duke's death, she yet clung to the hope that when Mr. Eyre was robbed of this second Madcap, he would turn to seek consolation where assuredly it would not be denied him.

'Does he come with you to-night?' she said, as the whole party moved on together.

'No; he will be at the House; and Doune will be there too.'

'He is there too much,' said the Duchess, her eyes softening as she glanced back at that younger copy of him she loved; 'he must fall in love, and forget his brains for a time.'

'Oh no!' exclaimed Madcap hastily—'indeed he must not; besides, we never fall in love in our family!'

'Poor Lord Lovel!' said the Duchess, raising her brows.

'He is very happy,' said Madcap serenely; 'somehow all his race take very kindly to the tender passion, just as the Eyres keep themselves clear of it. Have you ever met Major Methuen?' she added, with an abrupt change of subject that astonished her companion.

'No; but I am anxious to meet him. Even a bad copy of that charming fellow, Frank, could not help being more delightful than another man's self.'

'Madcap!' exclaimed Gordon, with some excitement in his voice, 'there is Nanciebel coming; I want to introduce you to her;' and he went forward quickly to meet her.

A bright blush of pleasure overspread the girl's face at

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sight of him; there was more than cousinly warmth in the way their hands met, or so Madcap thought, as she slowly advanced, and across her mind there flashed an idea that charmed her.

'This is Madcap,' said the young fellow, as the two girls stood looking at each other, each with eyes alight and curious, though with very different reasons for their eagerness.

'And you are Gordon's cousin,' said Madcap; and then the two slim hands met, and other introductions followed, in the course of which Cupid found time to shoot a dart at one of those present, and inflict a wound that not even time was able to heal.

'When did you return?' said the Duchess to Nanciebel's chaperon, a middle-aged matron whose soul was too young for her body, so that she often frisked when to sit still would have been more becoming.

'Only yesterday; and of course I have nothing to wear! So that really *is* a match?' she added, looking at the receding backs of the young people.

'I believe so,' said the Duchess drily; 'but we must not lose sight of them;' and indeed she would not for a kingdom have missed the precious, brief glimpse of Mr. Eyre that Madcap's words had promised.

But she thought no lovers could have moved more quickly at sight of each other than did this father and daughter a minute later, Madcap crying out:

'Have you found him?'

He looked cross and vexed at the question, then past her at the Duchess, and went forward, and was never more fascinating than in the ten minutes' walk that left the others free to follow as they chose behind them.

But when Mr. Eyre had put the Duchess into her pony-carriage, and she had driven away, happy as any

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love-struck girl of seventeen who comes trembling from her first love-tryst, it seemed that she had taken his good spirits with her, and after a word or two to Nanciebel, left the young people abruptly.

After that, Madcap herself was in haste to go, and when she found that they would all meet at the same ball that evening, said that she and Nancy would make their plans there for seeing something of each other.

But when she reached Curzon Street she went straight to the library, where she found Mr. Eyre sitting grim and silent at his table, with that vexed look which always strikes so sad and unfamiliar on young eyes.

'Dad,' she said timidly, as she stole up behind him, and ventured to draw his head to her shoulder, 'has anyone vexed you to-day—have you been disappointed?'

The gentle touch, the loving voice, moved him almost as potently as his wife's had done when one of his dark fits overcame him; and surely this child was his *own*, not Gordon's yet, nor any other man's.

But he did not say what his disappointment had been as he kissed her, nor for weeks did she again hear the name of Major Methuen from her father's lips.

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CHAPTER IV.

'How sweet is the briar, in its soft fauldin' blossom,
And sweet is the hill, wi' its mantle o' green;
Yet fairer and sweeter, and dear to this bosom,
Is young lovely Jessie, the flower of Dumblane.'

MADCAP was not of the stuff that easily makes women-friends; she had lived too entirely among men to have much in common with the average frivolous Miss, and the specimens of girlhood she had seen in town did not commend themselves to her.

But in Nanciebel she found a delightful surprise; for here was a nature at once profound and sweet, as in mood she was alternately grave and gay; sprightly, wilful, tender, she resembled an April day that with all its little petulant showers never suffers you to lose sight of heaven's blue beyond, and like a sunbeam prisoned, she moved lightly along the path that was yet set about with many a prickly thorn of trouble.

Father and mother were dead, sisters and brothers she had none; and her home was made with a distant relation, whose bread she ate, and whose charity clothed her. The bread was good of its kind, the clothes were carefully chosen to set her off to advantage in that race which must be run by all well-born maids—the race for a husband. Lookers-on regarded her as one of the fittest

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competitors in the field, for her body matched the lovely spirit within ; and when seen in public with Madcap, it was hard to award the palm of beauty to either.

Fire, courage, soul, showed in Madcap's eyes—eyes of that rare iridescent hazel that matches so magnificently with hair the exact colour of a chestnut pod when fresh stripped of its sheath ; the pure carnations of her skin, the red of her mouth, and the supple grace of her every movement bespoke mental and bodily strength, so that when she was present, she seemed to extinguish other women's looks by the vitality of her own, and in other faces men sought in vain for the expression they found in hers. In conversation she was not so remarkable as in her appearance, and probably no one who met her out would have added the kudos of brains to her already overflowing dower.

When, very early in the season, she discovered that to attempt seriously to *converse* with either her partners or the men who sat next her at dinner produced only amazement and discomfort in these gentlemen, and that the women could be eloquent only on the theme of their own and other folks' clothes, she banished serious thought from her lips, and but for common-sense would have rushed into the airs of a female fool rather than show any signs of wisdom.

So she tutored the flame in her eyes, and learned small-talk with more labour than Mr. Eyre's hardest lesson had ever cost her, succeeding so well that more than one fashionable fop found himself exquisitely happy in her company, being under the impression that her mental calibre was inferior to his own.

Doune would sometimes stare, but Nanciebel would laugh, for Madcap had been as complete a revelation to her as she had been to Madcap. Yet, however intimate

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they became, their talk was of books and *chiffons*, things and people; but of lovers and hearts, never a word.

Meanwhile, Mr. Eyre had not obtained the interview that he coveted; for though he had called so persistently at Mrs. Methuen's house as to feel almost like a beggar who haunts a door-step, the answer was always the same: Major Methuen was 'out.'

By way of variation, he was sometimes out of town, and his return indefinite; or he had just come in and just gone out again; though the miracle of it was, that no one ever met him abroad, while he had not showed at his club for months.

Mr. Eyre at first attributed this avoidance of him to the man's well-known aversion to any sort of society, and also the dislike he was supposed to entertain to any friends of the late Lord Lovel; but when even his letters were disregarded, Mr. Eyre began to suspect that there was some secret here, and became the more resolute in his advance as the other retreated.

Could it be possible that in dying Frank Lovel had dropped some words that Methuen had picked up? that this *doppel-gänger* actually held the clue that Mr. Eyre believed to have been lost with his friend?

Yet he could have sworn that was Frank himself whose eyes had met his; and at night and odd times strange thoughts would come into Mr. Eyre's mind, which was rapidly passing into that seething, restless state which in every instance had betokened with him disaster.

Gradually he withdrew himself as much as possible from politics, and even avoided the society of everyone save Madcap, who had lost some of her brightness as the season advanced, yet for some curious reason did not once urge her father to leave town.

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She had worn her train and performed her courtesy so gracefully at the drawing-room, as to win the Queen's commendation; had danced at Court balls (by special invitation), and had heard compliments from courtly lips that had sometimes so displeased her as to make her once flash round and cry out:

'Sir, do you know what women *are?*'

She had gone everywhere, seen everything under the best auspices; and assuredly a beautiful young girl in a fine position has chances of seeing the panorama of life in a way that her plainer, less well-placed sisters never can . . . all the world is *en fête* for her, everything turns to her its best and brightest side; and never had a country chit such a season, said the envious women who looked on, though more than one rejoiced to see her cheek pale (while men seemed to find a new loveliness in it), and hoped she smarted inwardly from some heart-wound that even her ten thousand a year was not able to cure.

But though Madcap might have jilted Gordon fifty times over, and though that temptation to flirt which might assail a saint who went much into society had once or twice gently threatened her, not the greatest gossip in town could point to any special man upon whom a favour had been bestowed.

She could laugh, dance, even frolic a little on occasion; but that odious epithet 'flirt' never attached itself to her person, and Gordon silently rejoiced as the weeks slipped by, and still she had not said a syllable to contradict that tacit acquiescence in their engagement into which she had lapsed.

Yet it was very clear that she never missed an opportunity of throwing Nancy Lovel and her cousin together, to Doune's dissatisfaction, who, for the first time in his

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life, found his sister as aggravating as the loveliest woman on earth can be, when by accident she finds herself in the place of a much-coveted somebody else.

The two girls were to be seen everywhere together; but while Madcap was happy in thinking the cousins were falling in love with each other, Miss Nanciebel's heart tarried behind with the brother and sister, who followed, and only the blindness of *une idée fixe* could have kept enlightenment from the girl, who in this instance was emphatically her own father's daughter.

She thought Doune's carelessness about the House, his dislike to talk of that career into which he had formerly thrown himself, arose from a feeling of neglect towards herself, and many a happy hour between him and Nanciebel had she

'Twinned of its sweet life,'

in her eagerness to give Gordon and his cousin time in which to arrive at some pleasant understanding.

Those who had watched Doune's brilliant youth said that the young man was falling off lamentably from his high ambitions, and pointed to his daily pleasuring as a dishonour to those intellectual gifts that, properly developed, should be of some service to his country.

But perhaps in discovering that a young woman in a long gown may be as sweet, fresh, and lovable as a child in a short one, Doune had included more than his sister, and was unconsciously making his choice between the good of love, the evil of ambition, till one fine day all his honours and all his brilliant hopes might fade before the answer of a pair of blue eyes that had grown shy of meeting his, but in which he might find such happiness as had made his father dead to ambition through over a score of years.

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But he was not sure of her, and at times, watching her open delight in Gordon's company, he was half of opinion that Madcap was right; yet none the less his love-madness grew, though but few signs of it showed in his looks and bearing.

He did not know that for him were reserved the timid glance, the gentle voice (always more gentle for him than any other), the ear ever on the alert for his footstep; but one day Mr. Eyre's keen eyes intercepted such a token, and he smiled, well-pleased; for of all earthly blessings that he could have wished to see heaped on his son's head, he would have reckoned as the choicest—love, and such a country life as *he* had lived with his own bright Madcap by his side.

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CHAPTER V.

'*She shrieked and wept,*
And both became her face;
No posture could that angel form disgrace.'

MADCAP stood looking out of window one morning, her hands behind her back, thinking. It was Derby Day, with a vividly blue sky overhead, and a soft warm air blowing that somehow set her thinking of the country, and conjured up such visions of coolness and space in a spot she wotted of, that the more she thought of them, the more delectable they appeared; and presently she turned quickly round, saying 'I *will*,' in the tone of one who knows she should have said 'I won't.' Then she sat down and wrote a little note that ran thus:

'Come in a plain print frock—as plain as can be—and come at once;' and having despatched a servant with it, and looked at herself in the glass, returned to the window just in time to see Gordon tooling his chestnuts down the street, and looking as handsome and happy a young fellow as the sun ever shone on.

'Why can't I love him?' she thought, as at sight of her he raised his hat, looking happier than before, and in another minute was standing beside her.

'Gordon,' she said, as he kissed her hand, 'I'm going to the Derby.'

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'What!' exclaimed Gordon, retreating; 'but you are only joking.'

'I am going,' repeated Madcap, nodding decidedly; 'and Nanciebel is going too.'

'But it's not a fit place for you, Madcap. Very few ladies go to the Derby nowadays; and, indeed, I shouldn't like to take you.'

'Then I shall drive the chestnuts myself,' said Madcap gravely; 'I'm sure I could if I tried. And you can sit beside me, you know—in case of accident,' she added, looking at him from head to foot, and thinking how well his racing get-up became him. 'You look very nice,' she said. 'How cool that alpaca must be! And how do you like *my* Derby costume?' she added, revolving slowly before him, and holding out her skirts with both hands.

She had on a white piqué gown, buttoned to the throat over a linen collar, and not a frill, flounce, or furbelow anywhere visible; but the burnished satin of her hair, the rich hues upon cheek and lip, and the vivid hazel of her eyes, made her seem to glow with life and colour; and Gordon longed to snatch her in his arms and kiss her, as he said:

'What does it matter how you dress, Madcap? But I have got to pick up the other fellows, and I am late as it is.'

'Go and pick them up, then come straight back here,' said Madcap; 'Nanciebel and I will be ready.'

'Not she,' said the young man; 'she knows better than to do anything so—so fast; besides, she's my cousin, and I shall tell her I won't take her.'

'Are you so sure of her?' said Madcap, looking delighted; 'and does she do all you tell her? Wait till you have got mar——'

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She stopped abruptly.

'What was that?' said Gordon, who was not wholly ignorant of Madcap's schemes.

'Oh, nothing! Now go and pick up your men, and come back here as quickly as possible—or we shall miss all the best of the morning. Now go! and if you are not here with the coach in an hour, I won't go out on it *once* more this season!'

Then Gordon went, and Madcap went off to her father.

'Dad,' she said, 'I am going with Nanciebel to sit under the trees all day. Won't you come too?'

Her heart sank as she noticed how worn and gray he looked; and she added wistfully, 'Would you like to go home?' then held her breath for fear he would answer 'Yes.'

'Not till I have found that fellow,' said Mr. Eyre, his face darkening; 'so long as he remains in town, so long will I; and once he quits his cowardly hiding, and takes to the open, I will come up with him: he cannot escape me *for ever*. But off with you, child!' and he kissed her and resumed his book.

Madcap left her high spirits behind her as she climbed the stairs to Lady Ann, who was a little indisposed that morning, and had breakfasted in her room, but was now up and dressed, and ready to hear the object of Madcap's visit.

At first she was impracticable; for she quite agreed with Gordon that on the Derby Day ladies were best at home; but at last she allowed herself to be persuaded, especially as she had long been wanting an opportunity to visit a friend who lived at Hampton Court Palace.

So that when Gordon returned within the hour all

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were ready, as Madcap had foretold; and never, sure, was a Derby Day coach graced by two maids with simpler frocks and lovelier faces — or so thought the men, and so thought all those (and they were many) who on that day beheld them.

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CHAPTER VI.

'Nature never did betray the heart that loved her.'

Come with me on tiptoe beneath the trees that poor Wolsey planted for the ultimate benefit of a thankless king, till we are close to the ha-ha that divides us from a meadow more glorious with its buttercups than was ever cloth-of-gold; turn your back on the red-brick house that blinks beyond in the sunshine, then choose the trunk that shall best afford you its lusty support, and look around you.

Coolness, space, and light are here; light, that falls in glory only to be broken into trembling patches by the quick dance of the shadow-leaves reflected from above; space, that seems to know no limit as your eye sweeps the perspective of green aisles to right and left; and coolness so pure and deep as to soothe the senses like a charm, and breathe into them a mere physical sense of rest that is in itself an exquisite joy.

Out yonder the world goes by, yet so far away that its echo hardly reaches you . . . . and between you and it lies a carpet of white and red, flung royally down by the chestnuts as their proud beauty waned . . . . nearer yet, in a golden slant of sunshine, falls a shower of green rain, only no rain ever dropped half so coyly, so beauti-

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fully, or wore so fine a tint, for these are the scatterings from the blossomed limes overhead, breathing sweetness as they fall, and adding the one touch that crowns and makes perfect this most perfect hour and scene.

Sound there is none, save the faint low murmur given out by the boughs, and that vaguely resembles the far-off sob of ocean (but the ear must be keen that will hear it), and the distant note of a cuckoo who lives in the grove yonder, and who is heard year after year, and far into the spring, long after cuckoo-flowers have come and gone, and the anemones with which his retreat is speckled.

'This is heaven,' says a girl's voice, breaking the stillness; but the voice is so sweet that no note of discord with the scene is sounded.

'No, it is not heaven, but it is peace,' answers another voice, in which no peace is, but a curious yearning, as though an unsatisfied heart speaks in it, and something more than peace is needed to content her.

'Has anyone vexed you?' says the first voice gently.

'No one. Yet I am restless—out of sorts. This very silence frets me, and I am no happier here than if I had stayed at home.'

'Are you anxious about your father?'

'Not more than usual.'

'Then your trouble is in your own heart. Why do you look sad even in the midst of your brightest triumphs, and when even envy cannot discover a flaw in your lot?'

'Am I so triumphant?' said the other voice. 'Listen. It was a custom among the Romans, on the occasion of a great victory, to appoint three especial honours to the victor. The first honour, that the people should meet

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the conqueror with acclamations and every other testimony of pleasure; the second, that all the captives, bound hand and foot, should attend the victor's chariot; the third honour, that, enwrapped in the mantle of Jupiter, he should sit upon a triumphal car, drawn by four white horses, and be thus brought to the capitol. But lest these exalted rewards should swell the heart, and make the favourite of fortune forget his birth and mortal character, three grievances were attached to them. First, a slave sat on his right hand in the chariot, which served to hint that poverty and unmerited degradation were no bars to the subsequent attainment of the highest dignities. The second grievance was, that the slave should inflict upon him several severe blows to abate the haughtiness which the applause of his countrymen might tend to excite, at the same time saying to him in Greek: "Know thyself! and permit not thy exaltation to make thee proud. Look behind thee, and remember that thou art mortal." The third grievance was this, that free license was given upon that day of triumph to utter the most galling reproaches and the most cutting sarcasms.'

The voice ceased; there was a pause before the other said:

'And what are your three humiliations?'

'I have not three, but one.'

'Will you tell it me?'

'No.'

'But I will guess, even though you be angry. You do not love Gordon because you love some one else.'

'Would that be an occasion for humiliation?'

'Yes, if—if——'

'He did not love me? You are right. Well, he does not love me, and I do not love him; the idea is im-

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possible. A child may have a strong affection for a—a man, but that is not love.'

'You are not a child now.'

'I am still a child to him, for he never thought of me as any other.'

'Do you see him often?'

'I see him never.'

'You have not seen him once since you were a child?'

'Once.'

'You will see him again?'

'I do not know. That is part of my humiliation—that he could see me to-day, to-morrow, and every day, if he so willed.'

'And were you *quite* a child?'

'I was fifteen.'

'Then you were a woman. And perhaps . . . perhaps he loves you too.'

'And now that you know this, and I brought you here purposely to tell you—perhaps you will be kind to Gordon—you will marry him, and you will be happy.'

'And Gordon—will he be happy too?'

'You love him; you cannot help making him happy in the end.'

A soft ripple of laughter blended with, rather than silenced, the pause that followed; then the two young faces turned, and—the one pale, the other rosy-red—looked at each other.

'Nanciebel, you have deceived me. It is not Gordon after all.'

'Yes—it is not Gordon.'

'Who is it, then?'

'Our confidences would be unequal. Tell me first of *him*.'

'He is a myth—a delusion. The ghost of something

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I worshipped from the time I was old enough to understand . . . . and, after all, I believe this fancy to be not love, but pure *memory*, and that I should find his charm gone if I saw him often in the flesh. And you—have you, too, such memories of *him?*'

'His presence is sweeter to me than any memory of him could be.'

'So you see him—and yet I have never surprised a sign of love in you for anyone but Gordon. Will you marry him?'

'If he asks me.'

'You blush—yet your voice is steady, your eyes are fearless. You have nothing to fear because—he loves you.'

In the silence that followed, one of the girls turned her head aside, but the answer had been mutely given.

The voices ceased. There had not been a single note of passion in the duologue; nature had not been outraged by a single false or jarring note; softly the young maidens' love-confidences had sunk into the peace around, and made it human.

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CHAPTER VII.

'A pious man doubting Providence, the spirit of the rose thus addressed him: "Do I not animate a beautiful plant . . . and where do you find me? Amongst thorns. But they do not sting me: they protect and give me sap. This thine enemies do for thee: and should not thy spirit be firmer than that of a frail flower?"'

Out yonder the world and his wife scurry, skip, and amble by, never pausing to cast a look to right or left, nor dream of pausing to turn aside and explore the shade and coolness of these fragrant alleys and silent glades; all are bent on reaching the end of the avenue, and pursuing those pleasures beyond that are so much less satisfying than those they are leaving behind.

The last of the coaches passed an hour ago, and it is the humbler holiday-makers now who fill every description of vehicle, from the barouche down to the donkey-cart, while, happiest of all, the tricyclists flash in and out, with that delightful look of ease and swiftness which comes nearer than any other exercise to the actual sensation of flying.

I do not know a prettier sight than two young lovers thus seated side by side, he in his close-fitting suit of gray, with stalwart legs well shown, and she with little feet peeping out, that do their work as deftly as his—only both must bloom with good looks, both must work

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loyally, and as if with but one impulse between them; and I think her frock should be white and plain, descending no lower than her ankles, and round her neck and straw hat she should wear a turquoise-blue ribbon.

Why should not such a pair go a-honeymooning some day, as they have gone a-courting all this spring, in their graceful little carriage, with the tinkle of their bell for wedding-chimes behind them? Is she not already, by the mere sharing of his toil, learning to be his *help-mate* in more senses than one? So, when I see such a blithe young pair, I wish them God-speed in my heart, and my good-wishes follow the flashing wheels as they dwindle in my sight.

Look at that old pair yonder, who once may have ridden side by side, but are now on foot. See how he hands her down the slope, more tenderly, more gently now than perchance he would have done the day he married her. He hides even the beauty of the chestnuts from her—in his wrinkled face alone she finds the highest beauty; and the look that passes between them is lovely, as arm in arm they go, tottering and leaning on each other, along the way.

Look in a woman's face for the character of her husband; in the faces of her children for her own.

A man is toiling along with his hurdy-gurdy on his back, and across its top a little child, sound asleep.

Ah! that sleeping child brings many a penny to the little ugly father, who may be a rogue and a vagabond, but who loves his child, and keeps him warm and rosy, while he himself is in tatters, and always more than half starved.

I wonder what invisible cause has set that blue-shawled, vulgar woman in yon magnificent carriage, and placed on

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foot and dressed in cotton the beautiful one whose beauty is as royal as it is sweet?

I wonder what home-tyrant has brought that hopeless look of sadness into the eyes and mouth of the woman who half hides them with the handful of dog-roses over which she leans? But in her hand they will wither and close, as perhaps her heart has done under a cruel grasp. . . . Yet if to-night she set them, howsoever faded, in a bowl of water on her window-sill, where the air and wind can beat on them all night, in the morning, lo! there will be a cluster of lovely wide-opened eyes, and on the pink and white breasts bared in wild freshness to the breeze, perchance a glistening of rain-drops, through which the leaves will shine translucent, yielding up a scent exquisite, intangible, the very spirit of the flower, that has made its dwelling *here* rather than in the heart of the proud garden rose, that stiffly closes her perfumes within her, and stifles even as she blows.

So to thee, poor soul, may chance such a miracle; so may thy bruised heart yet revive and unfold itself to the healing influence of tenderness and hope; so, too, may thy soul become 'a cup of thanksgiving full of fragrance, and an offering of sweetest incense to the Lord.'

Here come a pair of lovers on foot; both are shabby, and both are plain; but the man looks a churl, and probably is one.

Yet despise her not for that air of loving pride, of proprietorship in him as she struts beside him; to her he is no churl, for he has taught her the mystery of love; and, ignoble as he may be, through him has come to her a revelation of happiness, and so poor a cause has been as potent to transform her life, to transfigure its dull routine, as if he were beautiful as one of the gods of old.

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She will not forget this—no woman ever does; come what will, she remembers that he made her blank life a full one, and though he become the murmuring father of her children, and a sullen, neglectful spouse, to her he will always be the lover of her youth, and however she may come to scorn and despise him, yet the thousand links that bind her to him will never be broken. She will cling to her crooked shilling to her life's end, and strive to hide its crookedness from all eyes but her own.

Look at that little barefooted urchin, with the bright curly crown outside his scanty, brimless hat; the happiest heart here to-day, till half an hour ago, when he grew hungry, but begged and begged behind the carriages in vain.

But see—his eyes brighten, he begins to run, flitting light as thistledown over the grass till he has reached one of the last trees next the ha-ha; and there he pauses, his blue eyes fixed on a white cloth, upon which is laid a luncheon for two young ladies—a luncheon that has been carefully catered for by six young men.

A bottle of Moët and two of soda, with a tiny one of liqueur, a lobster mayonnaise, a chicken, a tongue, a roll of white bread, a pat of butter, a dish of strawberries and another of cherries—and it is at the cherries that the boy, in spite of his hunger, is looking.

'Give him some,' says the girl who has been acting as butler, and is now regarding her arrangements with some satisfaction; 'he must be a youth of taste to prefer being under these trees to watching the crowd go by out yonder!'

'I am afraid he saw the cloth afar off,' said Nanciebel, as she emptied half the cherries into the boy's chubby hands, getting a duck of the head by way of thanks as he retreated.

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'Cherries won't satisfy *me*,' said Madcap gravely, as she sat down cross-legged and began to cut bread; 'I never was so hungry in my life.'

'It was a long drive down,' said Nanciebel, attacking the chicken on her knees; 'you took Gordon a good deal out of his way by your freak. But how delighted he was to find that he had not got to take us to the Derby, after all!'

'And *we* have got the best of it,' said Madcap, pausing in her occupation to glance up at the boughs that hung all their leaves outwards like a thousand mimic flags; 'and none could wish a better day on which to be born, to be married, or to die.'

'No,' said Nanciebel, and sighed very gently as she set Madcap's plate before her.

'So you can sigh for him?' said Madcap; 'then you do not love him very much.'

'But you are hungry, and so you do not love him very much.'

'And I am thirsty, too,' said Madcap presently, when her pangs had somewhat subsided, and looking round for the nippers, that, alas! the masculine forethought, which had forgotten nothing else, had altogether omitted to furnish.

'If only we had a pair of scissors!' exclaimed both girls together, and looking at the sparkling wine, that now, unattainable, appeared absolutely indispensable to their happiness.

'We could get a corkscrew at the lodge-gates,' said Nanciebel, jumping up, 'and I'll run all the way there and back!'

'Don't,' said Madcap; 'it is too hot. Couldn't we send the infant?' she added, pointing to the urchin, who, having eaten his cherries, showed his gratitude by a

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lively sense of favours to come, and in readiness had seated himself at no great distance on the grass.

'They would not lend it to him,' said Nancy; and was gone even as she spoke, returning in less than sixty seconds, waving a pocket corkscrew triumphantly above her head.

'Nancy!' cried Madcap, gasping with amazement, 'are you a witch, or am I dreaming? You have gone to the lodge and *come back* in less than a minute!'

'Didn't you see? Perhaps there was a tree between; but I've done an awful thing!'

'You asked some one to lend it you?' said Madcap, who was now struggling with the wire, and making those faces with which ladies usually embellish the drawing of a cork, especially when there is a chance of its smiting them on the nose. 'It's coming! take care—oh!' and she sank down (as a woman always does) when the cork flew out, and did not recover from the shock till half the amber fluid had foamed itself away.

'More properly speaking, I borrowed it,' said Nanciebel, as they sat down again with their glasses beside them; 'it was not a very nice thing for a young lady to ask for, was it? He looked a little astonished!'

'It was a man?' said Madcap, a little startled. 'What would Lady Ann say? I hope it was an old one?'

'Oh, quite old! and as sober as a judge. He was marching along so sedately that I knew he was to be trusted, so I stopped and said, "Oh, sir! *could* you lend me a pocket-knife, or a corkscrew?"'

'This is both,' said Madcap, taking it in her hand; 'all that is not steel is silver. He must be of a confiding temper to trust it with you. Run back with it quick, before he repents of his guilelessness, and comes to look for it himself!'

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'He lent it me for half an hour,' said Miss Nanciebel, with great *sang-froid;* 'he said, "It is quite at your service, and you can give it me back in half an hour's time, when I shall be returning this way." I dropped him a curtsey and vanished.'

'Which way did he go?'

'Towards the Court. How came you to miss seeing him? He was not a hundred yards away from you.'

'I was feeding the Arab. And now for our strawberries. Alack! those men forgot the cream, but here is the sugar.'

'Madcap!'

'Nancy!'

'I told you the corkscrew man was sedate?'

'Yes.'

'But I didn't tell you he was the handsomest man I ever saw in my life!'

'Handsomer than your—invisible lover?'

'Much. Only he is fair, and I admire—never mind what I admire!'

'I expect this handsomest man of all is a mere barber's block. I think it would have been better, after all, if you had gone to the lodge.'

'I told you I had done an awful thing,' said Nanciebel, hanging her head. 'But, indeed, I saw his sedateness first, and his beauty afterwards; and I don't believe, from the way he looked at me, that he knew whether I was a girl or a boy!'

Madcap had finished her strawberries now, and with elbow on knee, and chin in hand, looked at Nanciebel, considering.

Why does a young woman look so much more lovely in the open air, in sunshine or in shadow, than in chamber or ballroom, howsoever beautifully bedecked?

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Perhaps because out of doors she is in the midst of life, movement, light; because Nature in her most sportive mood finds an echo in her grace, and sees her every magical effect outdone in the changes, quick as shadows, bright as sunbeams, that will succeed each other in a young and tenderly sensitive girl-face.

'You are lovely, Nanciebel!' said Madcap at last; 'I never knew how lovely till to-day. The man must be insensible who could look at you as if you were a boy.'

'The half-hour will be up directly,' said Nanciebel, with some alarm in her blue eyes, as she looked at her watch; 'had I not better go and wait at the exact place where I met him? If not, he might take the liberty of coming on here!'

'He has the right to claim his property,' said Madcap, sitting up very erect. 'But you need not trouble yourself about it, for *I* am going to give him back the corkscrew.'

'Oh, Madcap! Well, he will look at *you!*'

'I mean to make him. If only Lady Ann could see us! or Gordon! or Doune!'

'Would—would Doune be angry?' said Miss Nanciebel timidly, and with some of her colour flitting away.

'He would have a fit! And now for the handsomest man of all!' and she sprang up.

'But how will you know him? As you say, probably our standard of good looks differs.'

'Then you must come too. We will both hide behind a tree, and when you see him coming, you will tell me. Then I shall step forward and say, "Thank you, sir!"—that is to say, if he is not a barber's block. But I should like to give him a little fright, just to shake his sedateness.'

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'What will you do?'

'Set that urchin at the head of our feast, with all the remaining eatables within reach, and forbid him to stir. We will remain in hiding after the corkscrew man comes. He will look around—see nobody—then discover our white cloth, which he will probably approach, expecting to find his property upon it. When he has finally made up his mind that you are a dishonourable person, he will walk away, and I shall run after him.'

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CHAPTER VIII.

'He's taken off the scarlet coat
Bedecked with shinin' gold,
And has put on the horseman's coat
To keep him frae the cold.'

A LITTLE rosy urchin, with his crown of gold above his head, sat like a king all alone at the feast spread out before him, his back to the bole of a tree, and sound asleep, with a half-eaten strawberry in his hand.

By his side leaned a partly-emptied champagne bottle, out of which he had probably tasted, with instant soporific results; and beside it lay a gossamer handkerchief, in one corner of which was embroidered a somewhat uncommon name.

Out of sight, but not far away, two girls squeezed themselves closely against a trunk that would easily have hidden six; and one was impatient from waiting, and angry with herself at having lapsed into an undignified frolic, and the other was bent on playing her companion a trick.

'He has probably forgotten all about it, or he wants to punish you for accosting him, and giving him the trouble of coming back,' said Madcap indignantly; 'and any moment the coach may be in the avenue, or Lady Ann appear and find us in this ridiculous situation!'

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'Look!' exclaimed Nanciebel, in a low voice, and peeping in the direction of the Court, as they had both done since they took up their station; 'don't you see a man coming—tall, and carrying himself well—and—and very well dressed?'

'So well dressed,' said Madcap drily, 'that he would look more a gentleman if he were in rags. Your handsome man is not only a barber's block, he is also a tailor's dummy! Here, take it!' and she pushed the silver corkscrew into Nanciebel's hand.

At the same moment a gentleman who had been quietly approaching from the opposite direction came to a halt before the spread cloth with a sleeping urchin at its head, and he smiled a little, as one amused; for his quick eye soon informed him that two persons, without reckoning the present ruler of the feast, had lunched there but a very short time ago.

A pair of lovers, he supposed, who were now quietly strolling in one of the distant glades, quite forgetful of his property and him. She had left some of hers behind, he thought, as he stooped and picked up the handkerchief that lay on the ground, half ashamed of his curiosity, especially as its supposed owner had created no curiosity in him whatever.

It was at this moment that Nanciebel turned and saw him, while Madcap, washing her hands of all further responsibility in the matter, quitted her hiding, and turned her face to one of the long arcades, whose end is only visible by the patch of golden sunlight that lies beyond.

The superb one was close at hand; in the background a man was staring at the corner of a girl's pocket-handkerchief, as if rooted to the spot by the fascination of the sight. Madcap's back was slowly disappearing,

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and Nanciebel was fain to confess that her trick had failed.

Should she call her back? She would not come; and, after all, the whole escapade was in very bad taste, and it was just as well that this stranger should suppose he had seen only one forward girl that day—not two.

But as she moved slowly towards him, she saw him turn suddenly away—only, where was the handkerchief?

There had been colour enough in her face before, but as she ran it rose in ever warmer waves, so that she glowed like a rose when, all out of breath with haste, she at last came up with his long strides, and in a very gentle voice faltered out:

'Your corkscrew, sir!'

He turned then, looking not at, but beyond her, his right hand hidden in his breast.

'Thank you,' he said, as his roving, eager eyes came back to her face with a look of disappointment and unwilling relief curiously blended.

How could she have called this man sedate? Nanciebel wondered. His good looks were the least part of his charm; for a splendid soul looked out of his eyes, and spoke in every expression of his features.

'And so now will you give me back the handkerchief, please?' said Nanciebel gravely.

He started and coloured.

'So you were in hiding and saw me,' he said; 'and I cannot deny the theft. But I meant you to keep what you borrowed of me in its place. My reason for stealing it was because I found on it the name—the name——'

He paused, then said abruptly:

'It is a very uncommon one; yet it appears to be yours.'

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'No, it is not mine,' said Nanciebel, feeling horror at herself for extending the colloquy by a single unnecessary word. 'I never knew but one person of that name—Madcap Eyre; and the handkerchief is hers.'

'She is here to-day?' said the stranger, the blood leaping to his brow; '*here*—and with you?'

'Yes,' said Nanciebel, a little coldly; 'and now I will wish you good-afternoon, and thank you.'

She was gone before he could say another syllable, and he was left alone, standing with throbbing heart and madly-beating pulses, his hands clenched in the struggle betwixt duty and inclination that was going forward in his breast.

Through the trees he saw Nanciebel on her knees busy with packing up the plates and dishes, while the chief consumer of the feast slumbered peacefully on; and without stirring, his eager eyes roved hither and thither in search of the white flutter of a woman's gown.

How baffling were the trees! how almost hopeless a search for anyone beneath them, since you might pass within a yard of what you sought, but with the stout body of a monarch of the woods between you!

Yet desire, longing, the passionate need that cried out in him for food, however meagre, urged him with irresistible force into the way of temptation, and in another minute he was treading it with resolute, swift steps, leaving Nanciebel far behind, and fully engrossed with her task.

Madcap had wandered on, without taking much count of time; her hat was slung on her arm, she was walking with head thrown back, and face lifted to the glories overhead, when she felt, rather than heard, a step close behind her.

'Nanciebel,' she said, 'I have had a surfeit of beauty

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to-day that I think will last me a long while—almost until I get back to Lovel woods.'

She got no answer, only between her gaze and the boughs through which the blue looked came a pair of eyes every whit as blue as the sky, and Madcap's charming chin came down suddenly, and all the colour went out of her cheeks as she saw who it was that stood before her.

'Madcap!' he said—'*Madcap!*' . . . the name rushing out straight from the heart, and bringing with it all the love it had gathered about it there in one tumultuous flood of joy.

So he had not forgotten her; it had been through no lack of memory that he had avoided her; and the happy colour was all back in Madcap's face, as, with her hand still in his, she looked up at him.

'You are glad to see me?' she said.

'Yes, I am glad;' but even as he spoke some of the fire died out of his eyes, as though subdued by a violent inward effort, and the vehemence of his voice suddenly sobered to one of mere affection as he let her hand go.

Somehow Madcap knew then that this moment, the full happiness of which she had not tasted, had escaped her, yet she smiled as she said:

'Are we never to meet anywhere save in a wood?'

'I spend a great deal of my time here,' he said, and with every word the change in his tone seemed to increase, and deny the passion with which he had called on her name; 'whenever I am able to leave my mother I make straight for trees, and try and fancy myself once more at Lovel.'

'Have you the late Lord Lovel's tastes as well as his features?' said Madcap, a little coldly.

'Yes; our tastes, inclinations, pursuits were identical.'

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'Yet I never heard of Frank Lovel running away from, and almost hiding himself from a man whom he had condemned unheard, and to whom he refused the opportunity of explanation!' said Madcap, inwardly quaking at the effect of her words.

'And which I will refuse as long as I have breath in my body,' said Major Methuen, with no more shame in his look and voice than if he uttered the noblest sentiments heart can applaud.

'You have some reason—some mad reason,' said Madcap, resolved to push his patience to its utmost limits, 'for your hatred of my father; but it seems that he is not singular in being the object of your aversion, for all your old friends, and all Lord Lovel's friends, you shun.'

'That is true.'

'You even shun a nearer friend—a child-friend,' said Madcap, in a low voice; 'and how can she have offended you?'

'I never had such a friend.'

'You had, for I was that friend.'

'But you were not a child; you were fifteen years old, and a woman.'

'Then you might have remembered me as a woman.'

'Have I forgotten you?'

'Entirely. It is by an accident only that you are forced to address me to-day.'

'I deliberately followed you.'

'What—from town?'

'No; I picked up your handkerchief——'

'Accident again!'

'And stole it. I was detected by a young lady who had borrowed a corkscrew——'

'What! it was *you*—and you were close to me twice over, and I never knew it?'

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The girl had stopped short, her changing colour, her brilliant eyes, betraying her excitement; but in a second she had controlled it, and was walking quietly beside him.

Her words, her look, had startled him—but only for a moment. True, she remembered him kindly, fondly even, as her friend (and the heart of a young girl is tenacious of her friendships, whether for man or woman), but he was no more to her than that; and was not her engagement with Lord Lovel one of the open secrets of the town?

'Let us sit down,' said Major Methuen; and without a single backward thought of Nanciebel, of a waiting coach, or of outraged Lady Ann, Madcap leaned her back to the tree, and gave herself up to the joy of the present hour.

'Had you not an idea that chestnuts had some red in them?' she said, picking up a column of chestnut blossom that some rude hand had plucked, then cast down here to wither; 'when I was quite young, such was my fixed belief. Well, to-day I have found out my mistake. It is only when the flowers are fading that the red appears!'

'Do you remember the lecture you once read me of your country art?' he said.

'Do you?'

'Yes. Will you read me another?'

He was sitting a little behind her, but so placed that, himself unobserved, he could watch each change of her face.

'No,' she said; then added, as one thinking aloud: 'so Job died happy, after all; he *did* think you to be his "little Master Frank."'

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'Who told you that?' exclaimed Major Methuen, in a startled voice.

'Was it not written on his face?' said Madcap, half looking round, 'and are you not Frank Lovel's *doppelgänger*, and constantly mistaken for him by those who do not know that he is dead?'

'I told you that three years ago,' he said, with a chafed ring in his voice; 'that is one reason why I go abroad so seldom.'

'You could not wish to resemble a better man,' said Madcap, a little proudly; 'but the resemblance must be extraordinary, for even my father thought he recognised you as Frank.'

'And he said——' exclaimed Major Methuen, as if the words were irresistibly forced from him.

'That it was his friend's very self in the flesh; and instantly pursued you till reason convinced him of his mistake. At dinner that night we heard of the strange resemblance you bore to the late Lord Lovel, and my father resolved to see you—with the admirable results you are aware of.'

'I shall not try his patience much longer,' he said quietly. 'Mrs. Methuen is dying fast, and her death will release me from the necessity of remaining in town —or in England. Your father will scarcely think it necessary to follow me abroad.'

Was there a note of fear in his voice—a note that brought the hot colour to Madcap's cheek, and a sudden consciousness of shame that she was sitting here in friendly converse with a man who was avowedly her father's enemy? But her hottest shame was for *him;* and perhaps Major Methuen knew it as he watched the averted face, the exquisite nape of a neck that he would

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have given all he possessed on earth to have the right to kiss.

Suddenly she turned, and by the glow in her face, the warmth in her eye, he saw that some strong impulse was urging her to speak.

'*What* is between you?' she said. 'You are both good—both honourable; for you are—you *must* be that, no matter how you may try to assume a shameful part. You both loved Frank: if only for that, and your likeness to him, we Eyres must' (her voice faltered) 'love you; and shall a miserable misunderstanding, that could be set to rights in five minutes of face-to-face talk, keep you away from us when we could be so—happy together?'

Gradually her voice had dwindled from the eagerness with which she began her plea to a spiritless and scarcely audible tone; for in his eyes she saw that which no words of hers could overcome, even though his heart might break beneath his stubborn will.

'Do not talk of me,' he said, 'but yourself. I watch you often, myself unseen, and I find you as unspoiled by admiration, as simple in your manners, as when I first saw you in the wood. And I do not think there is any better-hated young man in town than Gordon Lovel.'

'Why is he so well hated?' said Madcap; and from her voice one might have thought she had tears in her eyes.

'Because he is your future husband.'

There was a harsh note of envy and bitterness in the way he uttered the words that made Madcap turn, and so he saw those shining eyes that had filled indeed, but for him.

'You love him?'

As she turned her head aside, he seemed to see trembling in her all the possibilities of such a woman as God

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and Nature have combined to make beautiful, and keep pure . . . and was such an one to go as priceless dower to a man who might love but could never understand her? For if a woman cannot raise her husband to her own level, then she must stoop to his; and the more of happiness she brings him, the farther will she recede from the splendid promise of her youth.

'Your silence gives assent,' said Major Methuen; and none could have told from his look that in the moments when he strained heart and ear for a reply he had lived an eternity; 'and you should be happy, for his devotion to you is one of the proverbs of the season.'

'He gives me his time,' said Madcap, who sat very cold and still, with hands tight-locked on her lap; 'and is there any surer sign than that?'

'"A man may give money because he is profuse; he may be violently fond because he is of a sanguine disposition; but if he gives me his time, he gives me an unquestionable proof of my being in full possession of his heart," or so says a great writer. And is your father satisfied with the match?' added Major Methuen abruptly.

'There is the coach!' said Madcap, starting up; 'and actually there is Lady Ann on it. They must have stopped at the Palace, and that is why Gordon is so late. Good-bye!' and without offering her hand, with only one brief glance, in which every detail of his looks stamped itself on her memory, she turned, and went swiftly away.

Where she had left him, he stood watching the beautiful young shape, the chestnut head as bright as the sunbeams that flecked it, until she had passed out of sight. Then, shifting his position, he was able to see the coach stop, and two figures in white ascend.

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Did one of them turn her head and look back as the coach swept out at the lodge-gates? I am inclined to think that she did; but the man who threw himself face downwards on the grass where she had so lately sat beside him, doubted.

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CHAPTER IX.

'She wadna hae a Lowland laird,
Nor be an English lady;
But she wad gang wi' Duncan Græme,
And row her in his plaidie.'

One morning in late June, Gordon read out at breakfast the announcement of Mrs. Methuen's death on the preceding day but one, and Madcap trembled; but no one looked at her, as Mr. Eyre, starting up and exclaiming, 'He cannot be out this time!' left the room, and, almost immediately after, the house.

'Poor chap! he'll be more cracked than ever now,' said Gordon cheerfully; 'but what on earth can he mean by dodging the father these three months?'

But Madcap said nothing; only watched her opportunity to steal away to her father's study, where she sat down to restlessly await his return.

How hard the thorn of deceit pricked her heart as she sat there, and thought of the useless quest upon which her father had departed . . . why had she not said to him long ago, 'He is your enemy'? and, alas! alas! was not this the reason of her holding back the fact, that she could not add, 'and *your* enemy is *mine*'?

Not a man had attracted her heart or fancy through

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all the perilous chances of such a season as a fairy princess might have bestowed on her god-child; not a lover who could tempt her to lift her eyes so high as to discover his charms or failings; for at the root of all her coldness lay the old reason, and '*But not like my Beverley!*' was her unconscious thought, as, one after another, her suitors (some for pure love's sake, some for greed, but all seeking her with the more zest, knowing her to be forbidden fruit) failed to efface an image graven on her heart nigh on three years ago.

Long ago she had forgiven Major Methuen's injustice to her father, for the root of it had been loyalty to his friend Lord Lovel, and however Frank might have misunderstood Mr. Eyre, he was her hero still, and her sense of faithfulness could appreciate even an abuse of such partizanship; but her hope of a good understanding between Major Methuen and her father had dwindled and waned with the season, and the good-bye at the cowslip-gate had come to sound in her ears like a farewell spoken from a death-bed.

At her thoughts she covered her face with her hands, and then she sighed, because she dared not cry; and in the midst of her fears Mr. Eyre came in, his brow more dark with anger than she had ever seen it.

'The man is *out*, as usual,' he said; 'and his mother's remains are already removed to the country for burial, says the varlet who has shut the door fifty times in my face, while his master sets out for abroad immediately. But, by Heaven, I'll bring him to book before he leaves! If Frank escaped me—if others have defied me—this man *shall* not!'

But even as he spoke, he felt the impotence of the will that had so frequently failed him, and turned from Madcap with a gesture that startled her with

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its violence, as coming from so usually self-contained a man.

She stood quite still, looking at him, and on the very verge of confessing the one deceit she had practised towards him; and if she were betraying the faith Major Methuen had tacitly placed in her, what matter so long as she soothed the storm in her father's breast?

But, turning suddenly, he said, 'Leave me now,' in a tone she dared not resist, and left him alone with his dark hour, his bitter thoughts, to be dressed to go to a rose-show with Lady Ann; for, as I have said, the Eyres kept very unfashionable hours.

As they turned out of Prince's Gate, a man going past in a hansom, and habited in deepest mourning, caught a glimpse of the girl's pure pale face in the white setting of her carriage, and, with a desperate resolve, turned about and followed her, though she looked at many flowers, and spoke to many people, before he got a chance of approaching her.

But as she stood behind a very tree of roses, Lady Ann being secure in the clutches of a gossip on the other side, she looked up, and saw Major Methuen standing before her.

Her heart leaped up, but her cheek was pale; her hand never dreamed of going out to his, but as they stood there face to face, the lesson that each had been learning apart, the one half-unconsciously, the other with a full knowledge of what he learned, bore its fruit, and all was over, all was said and done in the glance that they exchanged in that moment.

'I am going away for ever,' he said, and, harsh as his voice was through pain, it sounded sweet as music in her ears; 'I have only one more farewell to make; and so, for the last time, good-bye.'

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'Must you go?' she said, with pale lips. 'My father is ignorant of wrong against you; for his sake—for mine —stay.'

If there was a moment's pause that seemed an eternity; if there was time for the scent and hue of the roses by which they stood to sink deep into their souls, there might have seemed none to the onlookers; but Madcap felt, rather than heard, the deep breath he drew as he said:

'I cannot—and so good-bye.'

Once he had been able to kiss her hand at parting; but now, with the look of a man whose heart breaks even as he gazes, but to which he will not yield, he turned aside without so much as touching it, and she could more easily have died than called him back.

'Did I not see you conversing with some one, my dear?' said Lady Ann, appearing at her elbow as Madcap stood with fixed eyes that saw nothing.

She did not answer, only moved like an automaton; but on going home, went straight to her father, who was still pacing his library, his looks betraying the disorder that ruled his mind.

'Dad,' she said, 'I want to go home. May I go to-morrow?'

'Ay—go!' he said, pausing in his walk; 'and as soon as I have found this fellow—for the moment he stirs detectives will be on his track—I will follow you. Lady Ann can settle the affairs of the house; the others can follow later.'

'Thank you, father,' she said, but did not approach him, and sat alone with her heart for an hour, before any other eye saw her that day.

At luncheon she announced her intention, to Gordon's profound satisfaction, though less perhaps to that of Doune.

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Matters between him and Nanciebel had not been brought to the happy conclusion that all lookers-on, save Madcap, had daily expected.

Doune was not the man to brook a refusal, and Nanciebel was not one to court an offer, and only gave him just enough encouragement to keep him from starving. Assured of his heart, she dallied with her happiness, and perhaps was wise in that she prolonged that most perfect period of love when each knows himself beloved of the other, yet neither has made the confession that, however divinely satisfying, is less exquisite than the yearning imagination has painted it. Perhaps the tantalizing sips of sweetness she had vouchsafed satisfied him more than she imagined; perhaps a girl's blue eyes will sometimes reveal her without her knowledge, or the inflection of a tone unconsciously betray her. But be this as it may, Doune wore no willow airs, and indeed looked so handsome and happy that Madcap often wondered what unseen influence it was that worked with such satisfactory results.

Neither had she yet discovered the object of Nanciebel's affection, though she was sure he existed, from the fact of that young woman's refusing two excellent matches on such frivolous grounds as an unsymmetrical body in the one instance, and a tendency to drink in the other.

She was thinking of Nanciebel then, as Lady Ann murmured gently about the responsibility of all Madcap's broken engagements, leave-takings, etc.; yet in her heart thought things might have been worse, pluming herself on the skill with which she had piloted so great a prize through so brilliant a season, only to find Gordon's right unchallenged at its end.

'I shall be able to get down by the day after to-

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morrow,' said Gordon cheerfully, 'so you won't be left very long by yourself.'

'Do not come,' said Madcap earnestly, and then he looked at her more closely, and saw that she was troubled. 'It will take a little while to get rid of your horses; and I want to be perfectly quiet, and left to myself for a day or two.'

'Well, I shall go down the moment I have done my business,' said Gordon, looking crestfallen, in spite of his words; 'surely there is room enough for us both in Lovel?'

'When does Nanciebel come?' said Doune; and Madcap must have been deaf, surely, not to read his heart by the mere way he pronounced that name.

'I asked her from the first week in August.'

'Couldn't you persuade her to go down sooner?' said the young man quietly.

'I dare say. But not yet; not for a little while!' and with almost a wild gesture Madcap rose from her place and went to the window, but in a moment she had returned.

'I think I am tired out,' she said, with the ghost of a smile; 'it is quite time that I went home. I am going to Nanciebel now, and I will ask her to come to us as soon as—as—I am better.'

'Poor little soul!' said Gordon, as the door closed on Madcap; 'a month more of this confounded gaiety would have killed her, I do believe. Well, she shan't come up to town next season, if *I* can help it!' and he went off whistling, and treading on air.

Madcap found Nanciebel in despair, and Mrs. Burgoyne's household in an active state of preparation for immediate departure.

Accident and a sanitary inspector combined had just

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discovered that the house was fashionably built over a cesspool, and while one servant was down with typhoid, all the others, and their mistress as well, were frantic to be gone.

Now Mrs. Burgoyne had for years endeavoured each year to tear herself from town delights, and take that journey to Marienbad which, for her figure if not her health's sake, was imperative; but now her opportunity had arrived, and on the following day she and Nanciebel were to set out.

It would be hard to say which was the paler of the two usually blooming girls as they kissed each other; but between their degrees of suffering, comparison there was none.

Madcap's heart was a stone. Nancy's was merely torn with the thought of separation from Doune, without those words being said that she had so often checked, but now so desperately longed to hear. Had she not been looking forward, as he did, to her visit to the Red Hall? nay, had not the same thought trembled in her mind as his, that *there* he should ask his question, and she would give him his reply?

Madcap, shrouded in her own thoughts, faintly wondered at Nanciebel's distress; and glancing beyond her present misery, vaguely felt that she would miss the solace of the girl's companionship, for she had come to love her very dearly. Nor when a servant entered to say Mr. Doune Eyre waited below on Miss Nanciebel, did the girl's quickly dried tears, her joyous trembling look, enlighten her—nay, so preoccupied was she, that she followed her down, and the two entered the room together.

Doune had already heard of the impending departure from Mrs. Burgoyne, who had discreetly left the room

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when she sent the message to Nanciebel, and was now figuratively washing her hands of the girl, since her future seemed so brilliantly assured.

He came forward instantly, and took Nancy's little trembling hand; then, without a word to her, turned to Madcap, and said:

'She must not go to Marienbad—she can come to us at the Towers immediately, instead of later.'

Something in his voice pierced the insensibility that closed her in, as if a brick wall had been built up between her and the outer world, and looking from one to the other, at last she learned the truth. She received it without surprise or sign of any kind; then said:

'Yes—come; but not for three days.'

Doune had been holding Nancy's hand during this time, but he said no more to her than his eyes could speak, and Madcap perhaps wondered (with a curious sense of remoteness from all human interests) why this happy young pair had nothing to say to each other, and looked so grave.

Perhaps surprise even roused her a little, when, five minutes later, Mrs. Burgoyne having given consent, and all arrangements being made for Miss Nancy's housing during the three days before her departure for Lovel, she witnessed between the lovers a parting so unconcerned, so brief, that one might have sworn there was no serious feeling between them.

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BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

'Her heart and she.'

MADCAP had walked and talked with her heart a night and a day, and it ached all the harder—it cried out to her all the louder as its complaint grew, and she had no power to still it; and the old familiar home only made her think of how happy her mother had been in it, with a man more than twice her own age.

Ay! but Mr. Eyre had loved her, and this man—her father's enemy—could expatriate himself rather than forget an old grudge. . . . 'Oh! this was not love, not love! It might be honour, but it was not love,' cried out the girl, as alone at night, in the room that had once been her nursery, she stood looking out at the moon-washed woods of Lovel below.

That very look had been summoned to his eyes by the revelation in her own, just as his mere glance had touched her heart with unbidden fire, and kindled it to a passion that terrified her; for, however sweetly cherished in her maiden thoughts he might have been this many a year, she had till then been as ignorant of *love's* true image as if she had never heard its name.

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But the flame must have smouldered long, perhaps from that earliest day when she had unconsciously placed him in Frank's place, and in some curious way worshipped the two men in one.

Perhaps if she had never seen him more, he might in time have dwindled to a mere memory, about which clung her tenderest thoughts, her brightest dreams; but that chance meeting with him in the Park, that subsequent one on the Derby Day, had so filled her mind with his presence, that insensibly he had come to be the foremost image in it; and it only needed a last encounter by the rose-bush to make her betray herself.

What was he doing now? Pitying her? But no! no!

'He loved me though he left me,' she cried, living over again that one moment of perfect happiness that was at least her own, and never to be dimly guessed at, and longed after, as by those poor hungry souls to whom such a moment has never come.

Had there not been agony in his face as he took that last look at her, and turned away? had not the strength of his renunciation been but one degree more powerful than his longing to obey her bidding, and 'stay'?

Middle-aged, friendless, alone, how far had he gone, she wondered, on that long, long journey, from which there could never be a home-coming? Was he thinking of her now? was he looking back, and in spirit keeping tryst with her at the gate where, as child and man, they had met and parted, and where the seed was sown that had burst, full-blown, into flower, when, as man and maiden, they met three years later?

Unconsciously the girl stretched out her arms in the direction of the cowslip-meadow, and a wild longing to visit the spot seized her.

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No ghost of murder, no memory of Dody climbing up them barefooted, with his birthday rose, followed her, as she fled down the old stone steps, and across the courtyard, being presently swallowed up in the shadows below.

Soon she emerged upon the cowslip-meadow, whose stubble lay like a sheet of molten silver, through which, in her white gown, she stepped like a ghost, or some pale spirit that comes stealing to revisit the place on earth where it had found, and perchance lost, its life's treasure.

But within a few yards of the gate she paused, and, putting one arm before her eyes, went by instinct the remaining steps; then, dropping her head upon the topmost bar, suddenly realized, as she had not done before, to what utter ruin her life had come . . . for the young heart looks its shipwreck in the face so much more hopelessly than the older one does, since the old have known the joys that the young have never tasted, and the middle-aged stand half-way between happiness and its memory.

No thought of her father or of Doune came to Madcap then; the sweet, the bitter, the madness and ecstasy of love had swept body and soul in one passionate chord that made thought or consciousness impossible save of *him;* and that truest essence of the passion which makes a woman identify herself with the man she loves, whether in his humiliation or his triumph, his gladness or his sorrow, burned in Madcap's breast as she followed him in thought to the solitude to which he had condemned himself.

Probably no true woman ever contemplates, even in thought, the sufferings of the man she loves, as easily as she endures her own; and soon Madcap's arm was wet with

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the tears that her own agony had no power to bring forth, while her slender body shook with the violence of her sobs.

Suddenly she looked up, and saw on the other side of the gate, apart and alone, the ghost of the man to whose flesh and blood image she had bid farewell nigh on three days ago; and no shock of fear thrilled her as, all disordered with love and sorrow, they gazed upon each other, neither seeming to breathe, lest the spell that had summoned each to each should be broken!

Timidly she stretched out a pale hand as though to touch him, then drew it back, but not for fear, and looked again with such transfigured eyes of love as to man or spirit must have told their tale; and never, I wis, did disembodied spirit look such longing, passionate tenderness upon his sweetheart in the body, as did this lover, who stood but a yard away, yet would not, dared not, advance one step to meet her.

How clearly the mingled gold and the gray of his hair shone out in the moonlight; how stalwart and strong and brave his shape, with the head slightly downbent, and his face pale as her own in the moonbeams!

But even as she gazed, he seemed to recede, and a black cloud obscuring the moon, his features faded from her sight; and ere she could cry out or stir, he had receded into the gloom of the wood behind him, and with madly beating heart she was left to persuade herself that it was all a dream.

But the next moment she had pushed the gate wide, and without a thought of shame, or any other conscious thought but that she must find him, she fled on through the soft darkness that was all latticed and barred with silver; at first in silence, then, as the sense of loneliness deepened, whispering his name, 'Frank! Frank!' just as

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if she had known and called him by no other all her life!

So had she never thought of him till now, but in the spirit he would hear and understand her . . . gradually her voice grew fainter, and she ceased to call him, coming back slowly to the cowslip-gate, through which she passed with a long sobbing sigh that reached the ears of one who thought an angel with the faithfulness of a woman had passed that way to-night.

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CHAPTER II.

'What harm, my lord, provokes thine ire
To wreak itself on me?
Have I not saved thy life from foes,
And saved for sic a fee?'

No such excitement had been known in Lovel for many years as that which agitated it during the two days that preceded Madcap's arrival.

Hester Clarke, long since supposed to be dead, had returned; and though absent nigh on a score of years, had been at once recognised, and received with a warmth that betokened the attitude of the village opinion towards her.

No matter if she came so secretly that none, save her old friend, knew of her presence till accident discovered her to be at Synge Lane; no matter if she never stirred abroad, and shrank even from the honest hands thrust forth to welcome her, crying out that she was not worthy to take them, for there was not a man or woman in the village who did not reckon her sins as white to the scarlet of those committed by the master of the Red Hall.

She volunteered no account of herself, and gave no reason for her visit; though some found it in the arrival, on the next day but one, of a gentleman who went

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straight to Synge Lane and remained at Hester's lodging some two hours, though where he went afterwards nobody noticed, for just then Madcap drove through the village, and in the universal delight and astonishment Hester and her possible lover were forgotten.

But if her lover, why did she bring him *here*, to the scene of her greatest misery and degradation? And this man was a gentleman, with a curious resemblance to the Lovels, as more than one observed when he strode quickly past the gossips, looking neither to the right nor left, and more as if he were going to his own funeral (as one of the women afterwards said) than a-courting. 'Though what should two such middle-aged folk have to do with courting?' said the young girls, tossing their heads, and more alive to the disgrace than the pity of Hester's part in the great tragedy whose closing scenes had even yet to be played out.

But if lovers, then they chose a strange place later in the evening for exchanging their vows, since the village pedagogue, intent on star-gazing, came upon the pair as they stood side by side at Mrs. Eyre's grave.

Now if the worthy man had one faculty in use beyond that of imparting learning, it was the faculty of never forgetting a face from its wrinkled infancy to a less wrinkled old age; and at sight of Hester's companion, he, without a second of hesitation, respectfully saluted him as Lord Lovel.

'Lord Lovel lies there,' said the man addressed, pointing to the grave on Madcap's left; and being but of a poor heart and easily abashed, the pedagogue slipped aside, and sat down on a tombstone out of sight, to reason out the problem of a dead man having his living effigy standing just over his head.'

The moon had not fully risen, the tombstone was

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nearer to the pair than they supposed; and the pedagogue caught a word here and there that only added to the bewilderment of his mind.

What was it that had been done, and must still be done, 'for her sake'?

What did a man mean who said he was leaving of his own free will, and for ever, the only thing he valued upon earth?

And if Hester were his sweetheart, and he were leaving *her*, why didn't he give her a kiss by way of consolation?

To be sure, he heard some words urging her to leave the village as soon as possible, in case of Mr. Eyre's accidental return, and to leave no trace by which she might be followed; but if this were not Lord Lovel's ghost in the flesh, who should he be, to have so intimate a knowledge of Mr. Eyre's feelings towards her?

Lastly he saw Hester stoop down and press her lips to the turf above the older Madcap's grave, and then the two went slowly away towards the village.

And so it happened that another besides Madcap saw a ghost in Lovel that night.

* * * * * *

Madcap had fallen asleep, still enwrapped in the magic shroud of her illusions; but with the morning light it fell from her, and looking back on her passionate exaltation of mood the night before, she recognised it as madness, and ran to her mirror to discover the signs of it in her face. But she found no madness there, only an odd sort of resemblance to her father that showed itself in moments of strong excitement; and she turned aside with a sob of relief to the open window, looking out to where far below spread that softly-swelling sea of green, be-

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neath whose boughs she had pursued her mad love-chase overnight.

For she had *seen* him—whether in the flesh or the spirit, she had seen him. And had she indeed by pure longing found power to summon to her his outward presentment, though to her outstretched hand, her voice, he had remained insensible as the dead? And if his spirit, then he must have died, and none should blame her for summoning him to that midnight tryst; but if indeed she had seen him in the flesh, then he loved her not, but had fled from the sound of his own name as it followed him through the wood.

'*Frank! Frank!*' Her own voice seemed to thunder in louder and louder echoes through the silvery aisles; the very rustle of the leaves, the very pattern of their dance upon the sward seemed to whisper, 'He heard you calling—calling! And you will overtake him never—never!'

Shame seized Madcap, and for awhile cast out love. Had not her eyes sufficiently betrayed her, that she must shout her secret to the ears of a man whose only method of lovemaking had from the first been retreat?

While shame lasted, the scorpions of memory stung her, and she suddenly remembered that this man was avowedly her father's enemy. And what had the dear old father—her playmate, companion, friend—done, that Major Methuen should so hate, and at the same time avoid him?

From the first Mr. Eyre's attitude had been one of candour towards this double of Frank Lovel; he had sought sedulously as any beggar for an interview with him, and the evasions, the subterfuges that had prevented it, most assuredly did not lie at his door. The dishonour lay, then, with the man who persisted in a

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dishonourable silence; and gradually there grew in Madcap's breast a more intolerable pang far than when she had blushed for herself; *now* she blushed for the man she loved.

If only she might see him once more—take back by look and gesture the guerdon she had unasked bestowed upon him! But that was not likely now; by this time he had retreated far beyond the sound of a voice that plained and sobbed after him, like a forsaken bird that will not be consoled until it has found its mate.

Anger dried the tears in her eyes, and pride dressed her beautifully for breakfast, and that descent afterwards to the village for which every cottager confidently looked. But when she started, it was by way of the coppice and past the smithy, so that she entered the village almost unobserved, and more by accident than intention turned down Synge Lane.

The little cottage that boasted the only lodgings to let in Lovel, stood back from its garden, and the house-door being open, Madcap entered, then stopped short, as from a room within Major Methuen's voice struck on her ear.

The coldness towards him that had so rapidly grown within her, strengthened to ice as a woman's voice followed on his in accents of passionate pleading, of which the sound but not the sense reached her brain.

Noiselessly as she had come, so she departed. So this was the 'last farewell' that Major Methuen had to take before he left England for ever; and it was in the keeping of this appointment that he had accidentally strayed towards the cowslip-gate overnight. Oh, fool! to think that for his *friend's* sake he was leaving her! Oh, fool! to have mistaken him for her lover!

The women that morning found Madcap beautiful,

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praised her colour and her dress, but of village gossip told her not one word.

'Who is lodging in Synge Lane?' she said at last, and saw how looks were exchanged, heads nodded, while an indescribable air of confusion came upon the group addressed.

'It's a young woman, miss,' said Sal of the mill, stepping into the breach. 'She's only here for a bit—just to meet her young man,' she added in a flash of inspiration; 'and I reckon the pair of 'em 'll be gone before long.'

'Who is the young man?' said Madcap, reading accurately enough the stolid faces around her, and convinced that they were keeping something from her; 'and who is the young woman?'

'Well, she ain't young, miss, so to speak, for she's nigh on forty; and she's called Hester. And the young man, he's not young either; but they're just as handsome a pair as ever stood together.'

'They are old friends?' said Madcap.

'Yes, miss,' said the woman slowly and cautiously. 'Many and many years ago, before you was born, folks called 'em lovers; and now it seems like as if they had made up their minds to be happy.'

'Have their lives, then, been so wretched?' exclaimed Madcap, pale and cold, but with no other outward sign of the heart that was breaking in her breast.

'They've had trouble,' said Sal cautiously; but before she could think of further details with which to embroider her daring invention, Madcap had turned away as if weary of the subject.

'What ever made you tell her that lie?' said one of the women in a whisper to Sal; 'if she sees him, she'll see quick enough he's a gentleman, and not for the likes

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of Hester. But the Lord save her if the master comes down unexpected, and finds her in the place!'

'She'll be off like a swallow now Miss Madcap's come,' said another. 'But she'll get a look at her first, and 'twill scare her—just as if 'twas Mrs. Eyre rose from the dead.'

'Look!' exclaimed Sal in an awe-struck whisper, and pointing towards the entrance to Synge Lane, whence two figures were emerging; 'they're coming, and she doesn't see them, for she's talking to Goody Holt. But what's the matter with him? He's looking at Miss Madcap as if he knew her, and now she's looking too. There! off goes his hat, and she's speaking, and Hester's like to faint. And now they've took the road to the station, and Miss Madcap's going home by the copse.'

'Lord!' said Goody Holt a few moments later to her gossips, 'how proud Miss Madcap have growed in Lunnun! She just said "Good-morning, sir!" as if he was dirt, and without a glint of her eye on his face; and she looked at Hester, poor soul, as if she'd been p'ison!'

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CHAPTER III.

'Tis not the frost that freezes fell,
Nor blawing snaw's inclemencie;
'Tis nae sic cauld that makes me cry,
But my love's heart grown cauld to me.'

'MADCAP!'

'Gordon!'

'Yes, here I am,' said the young man guiltily; 'but I thought you might be dismal here by yourself—and, by Jove, you look so!' he added, with sudden concern; 'you are as white as your frock!' and he touched one of her flounces of muslin embroidery.

'And may I not be as pale as I please, here, where I came on purpose to be *quiet?*' said Madcap, with an angry stamp of her little foot.

'You seem to have had visitors, all the same,' said Gordon drily, 'for I don't suppose Methuen came to call on anyone in the village. Perhaps it's part of his game at General Post to come down here when he knows your father is looking for him in town.'

'Where did you see him?' said Madcap, continuing the task in which Gordon had surprised her, and which happened to be that of dusting and arranging her father's books.

'He got into the train that I got out of,' said Gordon, 'and stared at me as if he saw a ghost.'

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'There is nothing on earth that you less resemble,' said Madcap; 'and you are wrong in supposing he came to look for father or me,' she added below her breath, 'for he came on a visit to a person in the village. And how is Nanciebel?' she added, with an abrupt change of tone.

'I don't know, and I don't care,' said the young fellow, and snatched her duster and threw it down; then caught her hands and held them.

'Madcap,' he said, 'for once and all, you shall give me my answer to-day.'

She looked up, and the ardent love, the power, the protection of Gordon's look and attitude could not but strike her, in contrast with the cold neglect, the outrage, that the man she loved had put upon her.

'Oh, Gordon!' she said, and somehow realized that here was her mother's story with Frank Lovel over again; and something in her voice—more of pity for herself than him—struck the young fellow oddly, and he put her back the better to search her face.

'Who is it?' he said, pain hardening his voice, and for once making it masterful.

The colour flew into her face, the light to her eyes in that moment; however it might disgrace her, flesh and blood bore witness to the truth of how

> '*In her heart a grace hath reigned,*
> *That nothing else could bring . . .*'

and Gordon read the signs surely and truly. He dropped her hands, and went to the window, coming back just as she stooped to pick up her duster.

'He loves you?' he said, still in that stern voice so unfamiliar to Madcap's ears.

'No.'

'Then God help you, Madcap!' he said, and went out;

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and mechanically she echoed his words, and shivered with a sense of cold as she stood alone.

Was she to be left by everyone—by Doune, by Gordon, by *him*—(ah! this last was the bitterest stab of all, with a bow and a 'Good-morning, sir!' to represent their leavetaking)—by all save the dear old dad, whom she had betrayed when she loved his enemy.

She kneeled down by his chair, but even as she put her lips to the leather, knew that however faithfully he had loved her, he was not first with her now. She could think of him tenderly; she was vaguely conscious of clinging to him as her one refuge in the future, but for the moment she felt only a raging desire to be alone, beyond human sight or sound of human voices, confronting the fact that Major Methuen not only loved and rode away, but rode away with another woman. Her cool green hollow beckoned her, even across blinding fields of heat; and it was safe, it was secret. The only soul who knew of its existence was by now far away, and Gordon might search the woods for a month before ever he found it and her.

She caught up her white sunshade, and went by the way that she had passed overnight, shame stinging her at every step freshly, as she thought of how swiftly she had sped to the one-sided tryst in which she had taken passionate farewell of a ghost that in point of fact was a very substantial body running away.

She laughed aloud, climbed to her seat, and looked down the long and beautiful aisles that she had so long reckoned her own, and which Major Methuen had also seemed to think at his disposal. Then, the moment having at last come when she was alone with her misery and her shame, turning her cheek to the moss of the tree, Madcap wept.

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She cried out no more than her father would have done under equal punishment, but her body trembled as if shaken by a violent hand; and was it a ghost that in the afternoon sunshine drew near, and stood looking down on her with such misery in his eyes as her hidden ones could not have matched?

So had he seen her mother once, and a word from him had ended that one short, bitter space of a sunny life, and she had been happy, happy afterwards to the very end; and now a word from him would save her child, and he neither willed nor dared to speak it.

For himself he hardly thought; just as he had foregone his happiness and good name in the past, now he forewent his happiness in the future; but for every pang that he had suffered for Madcap the elder, he suffered a thousand now, as he watched the convulsed form from which there came neither sound nor sob, though the sod alone knew what bitter tears fell from the eyes pressed close above them.

And she wept for *him;* though his heart half broke to see her suffer, yet exultation swelled it—just as that divine revelation of her love, when they had met by the rose-bush, had at once electrified and stunned him; for hopelessly, passionately as he loved her, he had never looked for or expected any return in kind, and beneath that heavenly shock, body and soul had cried out fiercely against duty when she had bid him 'stay.' And he had wrestled with the temptation, and cast it out; he had put this most exquisite moment of his life almost untasted by, and thanklessly as a beggar into whose hand has been ignorantly dropped a priceless gem, he had turned away, nor thanked her for that precious gift; nay, had he not even seemed to scorn her, when in that strange ghostly meeting in the moonlight he had fled from her out-

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stretched hand, and the sound of her sweet voice calling him through the wood!

The echo of those notes of love lingered in his ears yet . . . yet he had taken harsher ones with him when by sheer self-mastery he had forced himself from Lovel that day, only to find that his *will* compelled him to return; so that at the risk of his neck he had leaped from the train soon after it had cleared the station, and come straight hither, bent on one last secret look at her, one last unuttered farewell.

For fresh in his memory was her cold 'Good-morning, sir!' spoken with the fine air, too proud to be contempt, that certain women can assume at will, and that had set him at such a distance as to make him doubt if his eyes and ears had not played him false overnight; and he had half expected to find her indifferent to his departure, or at most but a little ashamed that she had forgotten her legitimate lover to exchange a look of love with a man old enough to be her father, and for whom she had always borne the affection of a friend.

But here, in this woodland recess, to which her childish hand had once guided him, she was herself, and unconsciously the true and tender heart was bared to his gaze. Perhaps some sense of the wrong he did her by his presence smote him, perhaps a sense that his strength was failing him made him resolute to leave her before he should be discovered; for with one last long look at the half-hidden face, one gesture as of despair towards her, he turned slowly away.

Something beneath his foot crackled, and she sprang up.

For a moment the gap between her thoughts of him in the spirit and his presence here in the flesh was not to be bridged . . . her tears froze, her sobs ceased, she

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stood still as a statue, each muscle tense and rigid as steel.

'Madcap!' he said.

His voice broke the spell; once more she breathed, and a faint colour overspread her features; but into her eyes came a look that fell on him chill as ice, as, scorning to hide the tears that blotted her face, she said:

'Have you Lord Lovel's permission to be here?'

Her voice was gentle, for Madcap was of the sort that can rail at herself, but not at her lover, or what she loves; and though anger alone at his intrusion then filled her mind, her eyes and lips told each a different tale.

'Yes; I have his permission.'

'Then I will leave you to enjoy it,' she said, and moved to depart.

What! had he not slighted her enough overnight? was not her very glance of love by the rose-bush won from her under false pretences, since he knew himself pledged to another woman, and that woman the same he had flaunted before her eyes to-day? I say, was not all this enough, without returning secretly to spy on her in this her most miserable hour?

'No, you will stay,' he said resolutely. 'And so you love me—I know it now.'

'That, sir,' she said with spirit, 'is a lesson very easily unlearned.'

'Is it?' he said. 'I have learned but one; for my love for you is but a continuation of the old.'

'Then Hester must be satisfied with a new,' said Madcap, with a half-mocking courtesy.

'Hester!' he exclaimed. 'What has she to do with me?'

'Nothing, except that she is your—sweetheart.'

'My sweetheart!' echoed Frank, an angry flush rising

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to his forehead. 'Who has told you such an insane story?'

But he got no answer. Madcap had turned her head aside, that he might not see the joy that painted her face —joy, even though she knew that not all the weight of his love, nor hers, could bridge the gulf that divided them.

'And you believed it?' he said, perhaps never having felt the degradation of his position so keenly as then; 'and is that why you said "Good-morning, sir!" as if I were your footman?'

'Does one call one's footman "sir"?' said Madcap, half turning, and showing such happy dimples and eyes (still wet) of such pure content, as read him her heart more sweetly even than her tears had done.

'And you can be happy, Madcap!' he said, almost with a groan; 'and after to-day we shall never look upon each other's faces again.'

'Do we not love one another?' she said, at once proudly and gently; 'and is not that enough?'

'No, it is not enough for me,' he said, and drew his breath hard, looking at her with a hunger that would not be content with little, but must fill its soul, or famish; while in her eyes was the restful joy of a woman who is satisfied so long as she holds the one morsel she has coveted safe in her hand.

Perhaps no man ever really appreciates the unselfishness, the reticence, of a true woman's love; and Frank's voice was bitter as he repeated:

'It is not enough for me, and I cannot, *will* not let you go. If you had not loved me, I could have borne my lot, wretched though it might be; but duty is a poor thing when it demands the sacrifice of a life dearer than your own.'

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'Then, if dearer, it should be stronger in duty than yourself,' said Madcap firmly. 'Do you think I would have let you see my heart so plainly, given you my love *unasked*, if I did not know that we are eternally separated from each other? You should have sued to me long, had there been a chance—a chance——'

Her voice faltered, though a smile was on her lip, and pure and perfect as that first look of love which had revealed her to him by the rose-bush was the look in her eyes now, and a madness seized him, in which he said:

'There is a way—and only one.'

His gaze searched hers, as if to see what reserves of strength and courage lay behind her beauty and her love; as his face hardened beneath the urgency of his regard, so unconsciously did hers, till the girl's face was almost as resolute as the man's.

'You are strong,' he said, 'but your love must be stronger. Will you give up your father, brother, home, without a hope of ever seeing either again, to trust yourself *absolutely* to me?'

A cold breath seemed to pass through her as he spoke, for she was of the sort that could brook unfaith in her lover rather than his dishonour.

'Do you know what you are asking me to do?' she said, white as snow.

'To trust me all in all, or not at all.'

'Then,' she said, so low that he barely heard her, 'it must be not at all.'

But even as she spoke, the moment of madness passed, and he cursed himself for having vitiated in one moment of selfishness the abnegation of half a lifetime.

Cold and haggard, the fires in his eyes suddenly burnt out, he fearlessly lifted his head to her; and as their glance met, she asked herself if Nature had indeed lied

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when she stamped his features with such nobility, sincerity, and truth. No! Dishonour had laid no finger there, and if she might not trust him all in all, she would trust him yet.

She had risen from the seat that he and she had once filled like king and queen, and now he stood like a beggar below, though the boon that his soul desired was in sooth no poor one.

Perhaps she guessed it, as, his eyes compelling her, slowly she rose, and stooped to him . . . stooped lower yet, till her knees sank in the turf, and he could reach his arm to draw her down . . . together their lips mingled in the word 'good-bye' . . . and Madcap had kissed him.

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CHAPTER IV.

'I mayna turn, I canna turn,
I daurna turn and fight with thee.'

THE woodland life around beat not a pulse the slower or the quicker because a maiden had given her first kiss as easily as a chance common thing might, whose fancy had flamed up at the mere beckoning of a man's finger.

Yet no shame painted itself on the girl's pale cheek, but only fear, as the lips that had sought hers so eagerly grew cold as death, and the arm about her neck slipped, as without word or sigh he dropped insensible in the hollow below, and lay like a dead man, with one arm hanging curiously stiff and straight by his side.

In an instant Madcap was kneeling beside him and lifting it, but a touch told her that it was broken, and with a sob she laid it down.

Her voice roused him; he tried to rise, leaning his weight on the broken limb, but she cried out in horror, and lent him all her strength, so that she seemed to be clasping him in her arms, as for a second they stood together.

'*Frank!*' exclaimed a terrible voice behind them, and Madcap shrank back, as at last Mr. Eyre and the man she loved stood face to face, every line distinct in the broad June sunshine.

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'*Methuen!*' said the other doggedly.

'You lie!' cried Mr. Eyre, with a gesture as though he could have struck him across the mouth; 'it has been a lie, a deception, from the beginning, and I find you *here*, a coward to the last, and making for me traitors among even my own household!'

In his passion, he loathed his daughter too much to look at her, and so she was spared a glance that must have left its mark, for he thought her a partner in the whole fraud, and that by merest accident he had here surprised a long premeditated assignation.

But Madcap was one of those who can stand aside and wait, 'containing their souls,' and did not blench then, or after, through the closing scenes of the tragedy in which she had unconsciously played a part all her life.

'*Methuen*, at your service,' said the man who stood at the foot of the beech-tree, his face set like a flint, his eyes hard as steel.

'By God!' cried Mr. Eyre, 'either you or I shall not leave this wood alive to-day, unless I drag from your lips the truth.'

'If you have weapons with you,' said the other, 'you may murder me; but you shall not force me to speak.'

'Murder you!' said Mr. Eyre, and looking at the man before him with bitterest hatred and loathing; 'have you not murdered *me*, body and soul? Have you not poisoned my life with a lie—written down a false accusation, and run away, fearing to face it out or hear my reply? To lie, to deceive, to suborn my very daughter—my only daughter; to take another man's name and wear it, deceiving the doting old mother of a dead man—to act from first to last a hideous lie—would

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murder be punishment enough for all this, coward, liar, *traitor?*'

With the last word he deliberately struck the man before him a heavy blow on the mouth, and as the blood sprang, Madcap trembled with pure feminine sickening at the sight of men in conflict, and ran forward, crying out:

'*Father!*'

'You here?' he said, and he turned on her a look beneath which she might well have cowered; 'get you home, and pray God to make you more like your mother.'

'She is dead!' said the girl, pale as snow, 'and my place is by you. It is all a mistake, and it is Major Methuen who stands there.'

She did not—*could* not lift her eyes to the man who had taken the blow so tamely; but Mr. Eyre thrust her away violently, and said, 'Home with you—home!' and with a sob as though he had beaten her, she turned and fled without one backward look; till, her foot catching in the root of a tree, she fell against its bole, and lay stunned, though whether for a moment or an hour she did not know.

When she came to herself, and looked around, she was far out of earshot, but within sight of the two men who now stood in the green hollow that had so long been her peaceful retreat; but their gestures, however controlled, expounded the *heart* tragedy in process of being enacted. . . .

Here was one of those awful scenes over which the pen falters, the brush fails, for only human voice and eye could adequately describe and see it; but out of its prolonged agony Mr. Eyre came forth victorious, and, having *torn* the truth bit by bit from his enemy, passed with features

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'Dim and dank and gray,
Like a storm-extinguished day,
Travelled o'er by dying gleams. . . .'

moving blindly, and with uncertain steps, towards home.

But he had not gone a score yards when his daughter's arms caught him, and he looked at her as one might at the long-forgotten dead . . . in the awful wrong he had done her mother, the girl's wrong-doing was extinguished; and he did not even remember his anger against her as they went a few steps along the way that with only anxious, not hopeless, hearts they had traversed such a short time ago.

'Child,' he said, stopping abruptly, 'take your hand from mine; it is red with blood—the blood of your mother.'

'Father!' she said, struck to the soul, and for a second recoiling from him beneath this upheaval of her whole life. . . .

'Ay—*your father*,' he said, looking down at his hand; 'for it seems a hand can work without *will*, knowledge, conscience. But Frank will tell you the whole story if you go to him.'

'*Frank?*' she repeated; then forgot the man whose name she uttered, as, crying out 'Father, *father!*' she only held closer that beloved figure . . . nothing that he might have done could touch the core of her allegiance, and without one backward look she led him away, and, with every step a pang, got him home to his library, where immediately he fell into a profound slumber.

He had walked by her side like an automaton, and laid himself down as one; and in the sleep or stupor into which he had fallen, his features retained the fearful

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expression that had been stamped on them during the interview in the wood.

Pale and cold for awhile, Madcap stood and watched him; but there was work to be done, and, calling Nan, she installed her in the remotest corner of the library, with orders not to move till she returned; then ran out with at once the quickest and heaviest feet that had ever carried her through the cowslip-gate, to the hollow in which she prayed as she went to find the man whom, of all upon earth, she most desired to see.

Long before she got within sight of it, she *felt* that he was there, and was by his side before he had lifted himself from the attitude of despair into which he had fallen when Mr. Eyre left him.

She could not see his face, which was to the tree; but his open hand held behind his back fixed her attention, and, leaning forward, she saw that on the inside of the thumb was a diamond-shaped scar.

The discovery gave her no shock. She was wholly possessed now with her father's state, and with no blush or thought of self, touched that hand and said:

'Lord Lovel!'

He turned and looked at her.

Alas, alas! how quickly had love's bitter drowned in them both love's sweet! For he was paler than she, and so completely broken by the intense struggle of the past hour, that scarcely could his manhood command strength to look at her, and stand still to await her questions.

But the red mark on his mouth must have reminded her, if no inward thought had done, of her errand, and she said:

'You have tried to persuade my father that he killed my mother; and he is ill, nervous—angry with you for

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the deception you have practised towards him. But do you not know that my mother died in childbirth?'

'She did,' said the man before her; 'and Mr. Eyre is ill and unnerved, as you say. Do not listen to him—to-morrow he will think and speak differently.'

'No,' cried Madcap; 'I will have the *truth*—if you can speak it,' she added below her breath.

Had ever a man two such deadly pieces of work, with scarce a breath between, as had this one as he looked on the girl, and felt the second ordeal more terrible than the first?

As he had taken the blow, so he took the gibe—silently. Nigh on twenty years ago he had humbly imitated a Divine example, and taken up his burden without a groan; and now he waited, bringing his last remnants of courage and endurance to meet her next words.

'How *could* he be guilty?' she cried passionately. 'You make a wild accusation; but I know that you got a little touched in India, and so you have imagined things. . . .'

He stood mute as a stone; for if he had often lied before for her mother's sake, here he *could* not, nor felt the same imperative need, since in this second Madcap was the strength to dare and do which had been denied to the older one.

'So you are all that my father called you,' she said at last, as he maintained that stubborn silence, and she saw how the short hair on his temples was dark and wet with the dews of agony; 'and all my life long I have been worshipping a hero only to find him something worse than a murderer—something that stabs in the dark and hides in the daylight—in one word, an *assassin*!'

The ugly word sped like a blow as she advanced a

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step, and looking at him with eyes grown hard and cold in an hour, virtually denied her love, and sided with her father against him.

He made a step forward as if to leave her, but she stood before him with flaming eyes, fired by a resolution that would have made her go through a dozen scenes more terrible than this, to save her father.

'His life is at stake,' she said; 'I saw death in his face when I left him. Tell me on what grounds you base your awful accusation, that I may prove to him you are *mad* when I go back.'

Here was a way out of the situation—to be *mad*, to feign forgetfulness of all that he had said and done; but, curiously enough, the man who in early youth could sacrifice his honour and see himself contemptible in the eyes of his first love, could not in middle age brook the same degradation in the eyes of his second and last sweetheart.

'I am not mad,' he said slowly; 'but if it will do your father any good to think me so——'

'Oh!' she cried, 'do you think that I have not strength to hear what is *killing* him?'

'It would kill you,' he said, 'and you are innocent; it is unnatural that you should suffer so; *his* is the sin, let *his* be the punishment.'

'The young die more easily than the old,' she said; 'tell me the whole story, for I must go back to *him* directly. . .'

To tell her the whole story . . . that story of a sin which even angels might not utter without tears of horror and pity . . . it was beyond his strength; and putting her aside almost as abruptly as her father had done, he was gone from her sight before she had time to stretch a hand or lift a voice to stay him.

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CHAPTER V.

'Heaven cannot abide it,
Earth refuses to hide it . . .'

MADCAP found the library sofa unoccupied, and no living soul in sight but Nan, who sewed her seam through mental shipwreck, as she would have sewn it through one at sea, so long as the light or glare of torch-beams lasted.

Madcap shook the woman, in the agony of her fear; but Nan knew nothing of 'Master' except that he had suddenly woke up, and gone out on the instant, 'like one as walks in his sleep,' she added stolidly, not knowing how in her stupidity she had given a clue to the young mistress, who rushed away as on the wings of the wind.

All down the village she sped, with her eager question of 'Have you seen my father?' and having easily tracked him to Synge Lane, rejoiced to see his back through the uncurtained window, in conversation, as she supposed, with his tenant.

She drew in her breath with a half-sob as she entered the open door, scarce knowing what she had dreaded in her delight at having found him, but paused on the very threshold of the room, as certain words reached her ears, spoken in an unfamiliar voice.

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'I came down here,' it said, 'to look at the Pool, and think of my sin; for I knew you were safe in town, and I never expected to see Lord Lovel.'

'So, in tracking *him* hither, I have found you both,' said Mr. Eyre; 'and you and I are face to face at last—and if Frank Lovel *thought* he spoke the truth to me this afternoon, you shall substantiate it.'

'What could he tell you more than you know already?' said the woman's voice; 'have not both he and I bound ourselves as exiles to save you? Neither of us came back till we thought you absent or dead; and for your child's sake—made in *her* image—we both willingly effaced ourselves again.'

'Good God!' cried Mr. Eyre; 'have you, too, taken leave of your senses—do *you* suppose that I murdered my wife?'

'I *saw* you kill her,' said the woman's voice beyond. 'O Heavens! if only I might have saved her . . . but I was barely in time to see it, and the window was between——'

'*Liar!*' he cried; 'confess that you yourself committed the crime, and bear false witness against me but to save yourself. But this time there shall be no miscarriage of justice, and you shall hang for her murder yet.'

'I would hang willingly,' said the voice, 'for the sin is mine, and she never wronged me; my wretched weakness was at the root of all, and perhaps you did well to slay her—she is happier as she is.'

'What! you still persist in that horrible lie?' he cried, in a voice of fury, 'the poisonous lie that drove Lord Lovel forth, that, on his return, you have instilled into his ear drop by drop, till his very soul is drugged with its untruth? Before my God I will swear that this right hand is *innocent* of her blood as——'

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'Stay!' cried the voice; 'do not perjure yourself so; these eyes *saw* that hand commit the crime, and to avoid giving evidence against you I ran away, but was drawn back by my love for your child, and when you committed me for trial I resolved that, if convicted, I would die *silent*.'

'Silent?' cried Mr. Eyre; 'then how came Lord Lovel by his knowledge?'

'In your brain fever you revealed everything,' said the woman; 'until then he believed me guilty—and I did not undeceive him.'

Mr. Eyre laughed aloud—and to one of the hearers it sounded like that of a mocking devil, and to the other that of a madman, as she crouched with her brow to the lintel of the half-opened door.

'Does a man in brain-fever speak the truth?' he said contemptuously; 'and as to your *eyes*—who would trust them, with a knowledge of your antecedents? The brain that could plan a murder could easily enough plan a lie.'

There was no answer, no sound of any kind but that of Mr. Eyre's steps as he paced to and fro about the narrow room; but when those steps stopped, Madcap's heart seemed stopped also, as she waited for his next words.

'You have impressed your lie vividly enough upon Lord Lovel; tell it to *me*, and with some circumstantial detail, that I may the more readily appreciate it——'

'Have you *forgotten* it?' cried the woman, with a passion of wonder in her voice; 'how you came up the winding stair from the library, and, pausing at sight of the seated figure, snatched a knife from the open dressing-case and stabbed her savagely to the heart as she sat asleep by the window, before I could even cry out? You left her there for dead, and thrust the knife away in a cabinet, and went downstairs as one who walks in

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his sleep, and I was frozen, and could not call out or stir; but presently my senses came back, and I cried "*Murder!*" hoping that she was not dead.'

'And the scrap of your clothing found attached to her chair—what of that?' said Mr. Eyre.

'I had forced my way through the narrow window; I was feeling her heart, her pulse, when the light of your candle showed zigzag on the private stair, and at the same moment came the sound of hurrying feet; some impulse made me snatch the knife from the cabinet in which I had seen you place it, and I escaped barely in time, only to be intercepted by Digges at its foot. I struggled with him and got away, stumbling on for miles, till I thought myself safe from pursuit. But the child drew me back; suddenly it was borne in upon me that he was very ill, and in the dead of night I returned to find him dying in Lord Lovel's arms. But he died *in mine*—thank God for that—my little love, my angel! and as he lay dead upon my knees, you entered with the officers of the law, and ordered them to take me to prison, charged with the murder I had seen you commit.'

Mr. Eyre suddenly burst out into a fit of violent, shocking laughter, that revealed his state of incipient madness more clearly than a thousand other extravagances could have done.

'So that is the story into which you have persuaded Frank Lovel!' he said; 'this is the tissue of lies that you have taken seventeen years to build up! But a judge and jury will find out these, for to-morrow morning I will give myself up to justice, on your evidence, as the murderer of my wife.'

'No, no!' cried Hester passionately. 'You have forced—*wrung* the truth from me; but for *her* sake—for the sake of the vow I made to her the day before she

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died—I would hang for your crime rather than publicly accuse you of it!'

'No,' said Mr. Eyre; 'you would only slay my soul, as my *friend* has done. But each syllable that you and he have spoken to-day shall be sifted in a court of law; for by the God against whom I have sinned, I *swear* that this hand is innocent of my wife's blood!'

In the awful silence that followed, Madcap's heart seemed to cease to beat, and the very life-blood to ebb from her veins. Then came the sound of a woman's sob—hard, anguished, as the last hopeless cry of a profound despair.

'Ay, weep if you can,' said Mr. Eyre, in a terrible voice: 'you, who destroyed the happiness, took the life of the sweetest soul God ever made; for if your *hand* hesitated to slay her, your deeds stood fast to break her heart, and but for you she would be living still.'

'I know it,' said Hester, in a voice scarcely less unnatural than his. 'It was *my* sin, *my* weakness, that brought about the whole tragedy, from first to last; and that's why I let you accuse me falsely; that's why I would have died without speaking, if they had brought me in guilty at the trial—for *her* sake and Dody's; and because she loved you . . . and it was the only way I could make it up to her . . . though she's happy now, for she has got *him*——'

The woman's voice broke and became human; tears came, and relieved her. But Mr. Eyre, dry-eyed, incredulous, yet shaken to the very centre of his being, laughed again as he looked at her.

'You and my Lord Lovel have managed it very well between you,' he said; 'you must have had many interviews, to dovetail your stories so circumstantially; but I find more than one flaw in your ingenious narrative

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—though the best legal talent in England will discover them without *my* help before I am a week older.'

'Yes,' said Hester; 'Lord Lovel and I have managed *well*, as you say. What he learned, he learned from your lips alone in your delirium; then we combined, and decided on your account to live as exiles.'

'Say on your *own!*' cried Mr. Eyre furiously, as one whose endurance fails him; 'a pair of traitors, who deserve to die a hundred deaths to avenge her *one!* But this time you shall not escape me;' and he strode to the door, and was about to call to the woman of the house, when he stumbled over Madcap's body, as she kneeled with her brow to the lintel, pale, and with a look of death imprinted on her features.

He stooped to lift her, and carried her in . . . if he could have uttered sob or cry, as Hester had done but now, his agony might have been less; but grim and silent he sat down with his burden, and only looked at her . . . here was his punishment; here, in the suffering of this innocent soul, he found the chastisement that he had impiously denied his Maker; and in that moment (though unconsciously to himself) the core of his heart became *human*, and as a child who bows to the rod, so bowed he then to the hand of God.

Hester had drawn near . . . nor years, nor loss, nor anguish, could stifle in her that throb of motherhood which had governed the greater part of her life; and in this pale, still shape she seemed to see once more the Madcap whose life she had cut short by her sin . . . seemed to see chances of redemption even thus late in the day, though she might *now* do no more than kneel to kiss the pale hand that hung down, and which Mr. Eyre instantly snatched away, as if the woman's touch were pollution.

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Madcap opened her eyes on the instant, blaming herself for lack of courage; and meeting Hester's gaze, and reading its perfect truth, sealed one of those silent compacts that between true and generous souls are seldom broken; then took her father's hand and said:

'Dad, take me home.'

The familiar epithet, used through all the seventeen years of her beautiful childhood's love and trust in him, moved Mr. Eyre naturally and profoundly . . . for a moment his iron features relaxed, but the next he put her aside, and turned to Hester.

'You will consider yourself under arrest,' he said; 'and until I can secure assistance I will myself remain to watch you. And now, child, if you are able, get home with you; and since this confounded woman of the house seems to be absent, send down some people from the Hall.'

Disobedience had never been bred in Madcap's nature, but for a moment she paused, and thought deeply; then, with a gesture to Hester that Mr. Eyre did not see, went out, only to meet, on the threshold of the open door, Lord Lovel.

'I was going to look for you,' she said, without a thought of self, and as a soul might speak which has lost its body; 'there is some frightful mistake here . . . for she speaks the truth, and so does my father; and between them——'

'So here are more secrets,' said Mr. Eyre's voice behind them; and his glance fell cold as ice on his daughter. 'There seems to be a conspiracy among you; but a man is mostly betrayed by his nearest and dearest. And here is my tenant,' he added, as a woman came up the narrow garden, exhausted by the unusual business of a day spent in Marmiton, no more expecting thieves

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than debtors at the humble house that was left on the latch, morning, noon, and night.

Madcap stood between the two men whom she loved best upon earth, her heart torn between them, now espousing this side, now that, but firm in faithfulness to her father, whom she was resolved to save, though *how* was a question of the future.

'Your servant, miss,' said the woman, curtseying low to Madcap and looking coldly at Mr. Eyre. 'I left my house empty, but I find it full,' and she turned a curious look on Lord Lovel as she spoke.

'Look you,' said Mr. Eyre, 'the woman in that room yonder is a *prisoner*, and you will see to it that she does not escape.'

'And the charge against her, sir?' said the mistress of the house.

'False accusation and bearing of false witness,' said Mr. Eyre grimly; 'but you are in her pay, and not to be trusted. And so you must go home, Madcap,' he added, as he drew out his pocket-book, 'and send a servant off on horseback at once with these instructions;' and he wrote them down with a firm hand, and gave her the torn-out leaf without a tremor.

She took it as calmly as he gave it, not knowing whence came the reserves of strength that enabled her to meet this fearful hour; but, looking at him as she turned away, saw a sudden, terrible change in his face, and was barely in time to catch him as he fell, swaying slowly as some mighty monarch of the woods that quivers as with a mortal agony ere it crashes heavily to the earth.

But Madcap was young, and strong to love and save, and she neither sobbed nor cried out, as, with Frank's help, they two bore that beloved body up, the one his head and the other his feet, and carried him in, and laid him

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down where he seemed to lie in a deep slumber, that was neither a natural one, nor yet a swoon or stupor. But to Madcap's mind a sentence of Hester Clarke's was working to the exclusion of every other thought or outward impression: '*He went downstairs as one who walks in his sleep.*' . . . Suddenly she drew her hand from her eyes, to see Frank standing near, and looking at her earnestly.

'Leave me now,' she said. 'There is something that I must think out. I must save him. But do not go away from the house, for you must help me to get him home presently.'

He went without a word—what could any human being do for her in such an hour as this? She drew down the thick green blind to shut out the sunshine, and seated herself in the twilight thus made near the window, unconsciously occupying the same chair, and in the same attitude, as Hester Clarke had filled on a certain fatal night, over seventeen years ago.

'*As one who walks in his sleep*' . . . and from childhood Doune, who in mind and body was Mr. Eyre's younger *replica*, had walked in his, and had once startled his sister by coming to her room at midnight, light in hand, and, sitting down at her table, read from a favourite book till dawn, when, replacing the volume, he went away, though next morning he recollected nothing of the occurrence, and declared she had been dreaming.

She bowed her head upon her hands, and prayed for a sign; and even as she prayed, it came, for Mr. Eyre, waking suddenly, and seeing that seated white figure in the gloom beyond, advanced towards it with fury, and lifted his hand violently, as if in act to strike it.

But as she looked up, and he saw the features of wife and daughter in one, he stepped back, for he had found

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the lost link in his memory that had escaped him seventeen years . . . he had desired to kill Hester, and he had killed . . . no, no! it was impossible; yet this last accident had determined the course of his already unsettled reason, and, before Madcap could reach him, he had opened the door, and was gone.

There was a short cut from Synge Lane to the Hall, and this he took, while Madcap followed at a distance, dreading to startle him, yet nourishing in her heart a clue to what might be his redemption . . . and behind her again came Frank, while in the cottage two women clung together as straws caught in the eddy of a whirlpool.

The sun was setting in a fashion that betokened storm. Massed clouds of magenta and purple were piled high above a sea of palest green that melted imperceptibly into rose, which burned again into vivid gold, then flamed into red, while to right and left stretched vast plains of mingled hues that contrasted strongly with an ebony cloud, through which there showed from time to time little lovely islets of tender translucent blue, ever shifting and widening their shores, till, as the flame-colour sank beneath the horizon, they became more frequent, and touched with a purer light, as if they had caught some reflection from heaven beyond.

Once Madcap lifted her pale face to the sky, but never once looked back . . . her life was upheaved, and amidst its ruins she saw only the figure that stalked before her, upstanding yet, but at any moment in direst need of her support.

On the threshold of the Red Hall she paused, and turned her head, perhaps feeling a faint pang that her eyes sought in vain for Lord Lovel. And then the door closed behind her, and the hardest lesson of her life was before her to unriddle.

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CHAPTER VI.

'Cauld and eerie were the words
They twa had them between.'

An hour after sunset Frank Lovel walked in his woods, in which there reigned the profound, even awful stillness that affects some persons in the same way as the strange, shuddering fear of the sea that is shared by nearly all animals.

He had no such fear, but his nerves were unstrung, and often he looked behind, as if expecting to see one whose footfall he could not hear, and there was no joy in the glance that scanned each avenue, glade, and dell, though he knew that they had come back to him as his own inheritance, free of shame, that day.

But he saw only the girlish figure supporting the father that she loved, and whom his words had slain; and he stood still to smite his brow with his clenched fist, and curse himself that he had not lied to him, and would have cursed himself again for having yielded to the temptation to revisit Lovel, when suddenly the remembrance of Madcap's kiss fell upon him, and, with an eerie sense of her mother near him, he paused before the very trees by which she had unconsciously foretold to him his future.

They had been young chestnuts then, and in autumn had elected to burst out into an entire new suit of leaves and flowers, and, struck by the sight, she had said to

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him, 'Frank, don't those trees make you think of a human life in more ways than one? Of a life that has been happy, and all at once trouble came to it, and stripped it of everything, just as the chaffers came in spring, and destroyed the leaves of these trees, leaving them bare, when those around were beautiful and happy; but now, in autumn, just when all the others are sober and dull, these have their youth renewed, just as that life might be even more beautiful and happy in its autumn than its spring.'

'But there are some lives, as there are certain trees, that cannot be so renewed,' Frank had said sadly; 'once stripped of happiness, the heart never stirs in them again; and, after all, these seem to me the grandest trees, the noblest hearts.'

'No!' Madcap had cried; 'that which has once loved for love's sake, been happy for another's sake, may have thought it has lost all, but yet carries it in itself to produce as perfect fruit as any that has gone before, and its second youth is possible, as to that tree which has so boldly reversed the edict of fate.'

But Frank had shaken his head . . . there could be no second Madcap to him in the world; or so he thought then, and lo! as magically as the trees had been restored, so to him in middle age had his youth been renewed in the message she had left him—the sweetest message that a woman could, and that might have fulfilled itself in his perfect happiness had not Mr. Eyre's crime seemed to for ever separate his daughter and his friend.

'Oh, Madcap! Poor murdered Madcap!' he said aloud, his loathing for the hand that had so mercilessly slain her rising up with all its old fierceness, and driving out pity for the stricken man who yet persisted in his lie of innocence to the end.

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What could have been his motive? Frank wondered for the thousandth time. Not jealousy, for he had no cause; not fear of Hester, for his was not a nature to know fear; not lack of love, for no woman was ever so faithfully, jealously, fondly loved; nor could madness have prompted the deed, for, if eccentric, Mr. Eyre had given no signs of an unsettled reason, and during the trial of Hester Clarke that ensued he gave each day convincing proofs of the power and undimmed brilliancy of his mind.

And this last was the most damning blot of all—that, knowing himself guilty, he should deliberately accuse, and bend all his energies to hang, the woman whose only sin had been that she had loved him, and had wearied him. Strange, that if he must kill one of the two who had so profoundly loved him, he had not killed Hester, and lived his life out happily enough with Madcap; for surely conscience was dead in the man who could not only successfully act a living lie, but as between man and man forfeit his honour by swearing falsely.

And upon his young daughter the shame, the sin, the condemnation must fall; and Frank's heart grew cold as he recalled the look on Madcap's face when, in possession of the truth that he had withheld from her, she lifted her eyes to his, and he saw the awful change in her that one short hour had worked.

How long ago was it that she had flouted him, that she had smiled at him, that she had stooped with love in her eyes, and kissed him? How long since she had looked at him with blazing eyes and called him an assassin? And now she was alone, able to sit down with folded hands and see broken at her feet the religion, the love of years . . . but no—no! Not to sit above them, but to gather up those poor remains, to hug them to her breast, to

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warm them at her heart, and in her father's ruin and dishonour to cling to him more faithfully than in the days of his pride!

For her sake, perhaps, Mr. Eyre, once convinced of how futile was his attitude of denial, would submit to his fate, and beyond the few immediately concerned, no one would be the wiser as to the real truth concerning Mrs. Eyre's death; but if he persisted in his perjury, if he again accused Hester Clarke, and forced into the witness-box the man who had by word of mouth received confession of the murder, as Hester Clarke had been actually the witness of it, then nothing could save him from the public obloquy and disgrace that he had deliberately drawn on himself.

'Poor little sweetheart—little child!' he said aloud, as he reached the cowslip-gate, only to find that some one was leaning over it—a somebody who turned to stare at him with something more than the usual savage disgust with which the Englishman resents an intrusion on his privacy.

'This is not common property,' said Gordon brusquely; 'and this gate is used only by visitors to or from the Red Hall.'

His troubled angry eyes took a new expression as they met Lord Lovel's, and a suspicion that had been haunting him all day leaped into jealous life as he scanned the face before him.

'You are here to keep an appointment?' he said, his voice bitter with scorn and pain: 'then I will withdraw, for even trespassers have their rights.'

As Gordon turned, and Frank saw the signs of misery in his face, it was suddenly brought home to him how great a wrong he had done this young man, in suffering him to be brought up in, and grow to, a position from

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which at any moment he was liable to be ousted. And more than that, alas! for had not propinquity, youth, and natural tastes in common, made Madcap and he one of those ideal pairs whose marriages are said to be registered in heaven? And he had come between them.

'I am no trespasser,' he said; 'and it is better that you should know the truth from me than from Mr. Eyre. I am your cousin, Frank Lovel; but for certain reasons I exchanged name and identity with Major Methuen after his death.'

'And these reasons?' said Gordon, his back to the gate, his eyes on the man who for the moment he saw only as Madcap's lover, not the rightful heir come to cast him out of his kingdom; 'they must be strange ones, since no urgency on the part of Mr. Eyre could force you to reveal them.'

'He sought me as Methuen,' said Frank slowly, 'now he knows me for myself; and whatever my faults may have been, he does not despise me.'

'And you think it honourable to wear one man's name, then quietly resume your own, thereby cheating another out of his inheritance—and more?' said the young man, with a contempt of look that stung like a lash. 'There may be reasons why a man should be ashamed to look another in the face—why he should skulk, and hide, make excuses (each a lie) rather than speak out; but I hope there are few who would steal into an English gentleman's house in his absence and win his daughter's affections on false pretences.'

'Let him keep who is able to win,' said Frank grimly. 'You had your chance, and you missed it. But on Mr. Eyre it depends whether you keep the inheritance I deliberately forfeited in your favour. If he elects to keep silence on the circumstances that led to my banish-

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ment, I shall at once leave England, and for ever; but if he insists on raking up the whole dreadful business, I have no choice but to remain, and appear as witness.'

'What business?' said Gordon curtly.

'Has she not told you?' exclaimed Frank.

'I have not seen *Miss Eyre* since about three o'clock this afternoon,' said Gordon, 'when I happened to tell her that I saw you departing in the same train from which I got out. No doubt you had just left her,' added the young man, with a forced sneer; 'and apparently you were in some haste to return.'

'In so much,' said Frank drily, 'that I jumped out of the train as soon as it had cleared the station, and instead of breaking my neck, came off with a smashed arm; and, after all, it had better have been my neck.'

'And you have been carrying it about unset for nearly five hours!' exclaimed Gordon; 'come up to the house —your own house—man, and have it attended to.'

'Presently,' said Frank, 'for I won't go out of sight of the Hall. There will be trouble there to-night, and worse to-morrow.'

'What is it?' said Gordon, thrusting aside all thought of Madcap as he looked at the pallid face, which bore fewer signs, indeed, of triumph than of intense mental and bodily pain.

'You are bound to know, sooner or later,' said Frank slowly, 'so you had better have the truth now. Mr. Eyre murdered his wife, and believed his crime undetected. By an extraordinary accident, to-day he has seen the only two persons on earth who could have convicted him of it—Hester Clarke and myself.'

'Hester Clarke!' cried Gordon, in horror; 'why, that is the woman whom he suspected—whom he caused to

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be imprisoned, and nearly hanged on circumstantial evidence!'

'And who would have submitted to be hanged, rather than betray him,' said Frank.

'And the other witness?' exclaimed Gordon.

'Is here,' and Frank touched his breast. 'In Mr. Eyre's brain-fever, after the trial, he revealed every incident of the tragedy, went through it in pantomime, and even showed the place in which he had placed the blood-stained knife found by Hester; but I believed these were mere hallucinations, till, on describing them to her (for she had lingered in the place to know the issue of his dangerous illness), I saw such signs in her face as convinced me that she alone knew the real secret of Madcap's death. Bit by bit, I wrung it from her; how she had seen the murder committed by his hand; but because she believed herself instrumental in it, would have died rather than accuse him.

'Together we agreed to go different ways, to leave him to fate, chance, himself; but as quickly as he had strength to move, he set out in pursuit of me. No doubt you have heard the story: how, after long search, he thought he came up with me at Sevastopol, but only to confound me with another man, whose body he brought home, and who was buried in my name. I had been dangerously wounded by Methuen's very side, and when I came to myself, was on board a steamer, sent home as a hopeless invalid, and with my name and personality changed to that of "Methuen." No one in the ship had known either of us by sight; half the officers in my regiment were dead, or had remained to fight; there was not a soul to swear to my real identity; but I had forgotten that in taking Major Methuen's name I had also incurred his responsibilities, and only afterwards remembered that

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he had a mother to whom he was most deeply attached, and who was, no doubt, watching the papers eagerly for news of him each day.

'I resolved to go to her, to tell her the truth; but on landing I became so ill that the doctors gave me over, and I sent for her—only to be wept over with tears of joy as her *son*. I could not tell her then; but later, when I had turned the corner, I did. At first she would not believe it, declared that the injury to my head had affected my brain, and that she could swear to me as her own child; nor was this idea ever uprooted from her mind, and from then till the time of her death I made my home with her as her son, and came to love her as if she had really been my mother.

'We travelled constantly, but rarely visited London. At the end of thirteen years, I saw announced the death of Mr. Eyre on board the sailing ship *Arizona*, and I resolved to return to England, and, as a stranger, revisit Lovel to see Job, and decide whether I would resume the name I had deliberately forfeited. I arrived just in time to hear his last words, and remained long enough to get the news that Mr. Eyre was safe, and would soon return; but between the two events I had seen Madcap.'

Gordon lifted his head, and looked at the man who had so bitterly wronged him, yet had so bitterly suffered. And in his jealous, passionate heart began to stir something of the old hero-worship that had made his dead cousin a living example to his own life.

'It was here that I saw her, and I thought it was her mother's spirit that came tripping over the cowslip-heads to meet me, for I believed Mrs. Eyre's infant to be dead, and here was her living image, just as lovely, as sweet, as dear; and she spoke to me, she was kind to me, and

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I fell in love with her. I had never ceased to love her mother, and this new love was but a continuation of the old. I knew the last to be as hopeless as the first; that, face to face with Mr. Eyre, I could not have hidden my knowledge of his crime, and, rather than accuse him, I again left England, resolved never to return. But Mrs. Methuen's increasing illness brought us back to London, and though I shunned my fellow-men, accident one evening brought me face to face with him. He recognised me on the spot, and thenceforth pursued me. I was tied to the house where my adopted mother lay dying, and somehow managed to evade him.

'Meanwhile, I saw you sometimes, and envied you. You were to be Madcap's husband, and report said that she looked at no man but you. My mother died and was removed to the country for burial, and I was following her the next day, when, driving in opposite directions, I met Madcap.'

He paused, then said abruptly:

'I don't know why I am telling you all this, but that I want you to know I have not acted in as underhand a way as you supposed. I followed her to the rose-show; we spoke, and parted. I never expected to see her again; and, having buried my mother, came straight here yesterday. To my surprise, I found Hester Clarke in the village, bent on one of those visits to Dody's grave that were impossible when Mr. Eyre was at home. Never was there a more fatal one than this, for without her evidence Mr. Eyre might have feigned to believe me a madman; but they have met, and he has forced from her every detail of the murder.'

'Whose murder?' said the voice of Doune close behind them; and the two men turned to see a younger image of Mr. Eyre, pale, and with flashing eyes that looked from

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one to the other in angry question. 'I am no eavesdropper,' he added, before either could speak, 'and always go this way to the Red Hall. But I could not help hearing certain words that demand an explanation. You and I' (he turned to Gordon) 'always knew the accusations against the dear old father—but it will be curious if a *stranger* proves them true.'

He got no answer, only averted looks, for here was a difficulty for which neither was prepared.

Perhaps Gordon knew best how the long alienation between father and son had been gradually broken down, till only love and trust lay between them; but Frank remembered the stubborn childish hate that had vexed the boy's mother, and saw new misery for Mr. Eyre ahead.

'Are you both *dumb ?*' cried the young man fiercely; 'then I will get the truth from my father!' and he flung the gate open, and crossed the meadow.

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CHAPTER VII.

'Unfit to live or die—O marble heart!
After him, fellow! drag him to the block.'

Mr. Eyre had locked himself in his study on his return, and though he had not tasted food since his arrival at noon, none durst disturb him—not even Madcap, who forced herself to eat, knowing the work that lay before her.

But later she heard sounds like blows on the locked door, and ran out to see Doune standing pale and grim as fate waiting for admittance; and even as she would have drawn him back, the bolts revolved, and Mr. Eyre faced them, gaunt and terrible; though while he beckoned the son in, he shut the daughter out.

'Father,' said Doune, as they stood face to face, 'did you kill my mother?'

'So they say,' said Mr. Eyre; 'for there are two witnesses—the one who *saw* it, and the one to whom I confessed it. Yet I swear that I am innocent of the deed, and they are either mad or conspirators who accuse me.'

'Who are your accusers?' said Doune.

Something in his son's voice smote him like a blow; but Mr. Eyre's face only hardened as he said:

'You will find both in the village: their names are Hester Clarke and Frank Lovel.'

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'Frank Lovel!' exclaimed Doune, starting violently. 'He is dead—or was your bringing of his body home a—a——'

'Call it a lie, if you will,' said Mr. Eyre coldly, 'and believe everything against me that is possible. To-night I am arranging my affairs; to-morrow morning I send to Busby, as the nearest magistrate, and surrender myself at Marmiton Gaol. Either those who have falsely accused me shall come forward to bear witness against me, or I will reckon them the basest traitors that ever disgraced God's earth. Against the traitors of my own household I cannot guard. Go to your sister—if she is not abroad with her lover. I have work to do, and must be alone to-night.'

For a moment the eyes of father and son met as antagonists; then Doune, without a word, turned and went out.

Madcap was waiting, but only by the light she held made herself known as she followed him to the room where hung that picture of his mother to which he had turned in his every childish and boyish trouble, and in whose lineaments now he seemed to trace a shadow of the awful fate that had overtaken her.

'Mother—*mother!*' he said aloud; then saw Madcap standing there, pale, and with down-bent head, yet with a vigour in her attitude that did not betoken despair.

'So it is true,' he said slowly, 'and all these years he has been a living and acting *lie;* and I was right when, as a child, I hated him for driving me from her—for he was jealous, and he killed her.'

He dashed one hand across his eyes, shuddering violently, and Madcap did not dare to approach him till the paroxysm was past; then stole gently to his side, and said:

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'It is true that he killed her — but he does not know it.'

Doune laughed, and never had father and son shown a more remarkable resemblance to each other than in that moment.

The very extravagance of gesture and voice were identical; yet Madcap's heart rose, rather than sank, as she saw each token of Mr. Eyre's mental trouble reproduced in her brother.

'He killed her, and he does not know it!' said the young man, his haggard eyes seeking that beloved mother-face; 'you talk madness . . . Oh, unnatural wretch!' he cried, striking his foot against the floor: 'and she loved him—she died in his arms; she could scarcely spare a look even for her children! And with that awful knowledge in his heart, with her blood upon his hand, he could seem to love, to cherish us——'

'And he *did*,' said Madcap firmly. 'What! is it all blotted out in your mind, how he has had no thought—no care for himself all these years, but only for *us?* And now that he needs us most, shall we repay him with ingratitude? Do not judge him to-night, or by the morning you may be sorry.'

Doune drew back, and looked at her with the first unkind glance he had given her in his life.

'Women have strange minds,' he said harshly; 'they will cling to and fawn on the hand that destroys them; but to a man a fact is a fact, to-morrow is not to-day. Does he mean to escape to-night?' he added, turning to her suddenly; 'for that would be the most cowardly act of all; and you would be a criminal to assist him, since his sole act of grace would be to confess, and clear the woman he accused.'

'He will not escape,' said Madcap coldly, but with her

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heart beating fast. 'Are you going to stay here to *watch* him?' she added, with a gibe in her voice that brought the blood to his pale cheek.

'Not I; it would suffocate me to remain under the same roof with him. No doubt I can find a lodging in the woods——' He paused as if struck by a sudden thought; then said—'My father spoke of you as probably abroad with a lover. Did he mean Gordon?'

'No,' said Madcap, as naturally as if she had said 'Yes.'

'The father first, the sister next,' said Doune; 'is there anyone left on earth to trust?'

'There is Nanciebel,' said Madcap.

Sorely tried as she was, the old invincible spirit looked out of her eyes, and a hidden source of happiness within dared to breathe softly, while a secret hope of saving her father lent strength to go through with her work to the end.

For a moment Doune's face softened, then grew hard as iron.

'I love her,' he said; 'but if I had known yesterday what I know to-day, I would not have asked her to be my wife. A felon's son may inherit more than physical traits, and a young girl's life may not be safe with him.'

'Has she no courage?' said Madcap, with a scorn instantly repented of, as she saw how intense his suffering was. 'My dear,' she said, putting her arms round him, 'go home to Gordon. By the morning I may have something to tell you that will clear our father. Or'—her voice sank lower—'there may be fresh misfortunes that I prefer to face alone.'

'You always loved him best,' said Doune jealously, as he turned away, 'just as *she* did——'

'But you have your Nanciebel,' she said softly, as if

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the thought of loving, and being loved, had for a moment thrust her father from her mind.

'And you have your lover,' he said bitterly. 'I don't know his name.'

'His name is Lord Lovel,' she said proudly.

'The man who has masqueraded so long as Major Methuen; the man I saw just now in Lovel woods talking with Gordon?'

'Yes,' said Madcap; 'he will not run away any more —he means to stay.'

'Madcap!' cried the young man, seizing her hand, 'what does all this mean? You admit yourself to be the dupe of a madman whom you have become acquainted with in some clandestine manner, and you deliberately tell me in one and the same breath that our father is at once guilty and innocent.'

'If Frank Lovel is mad, then I am mad too,' said Madcap; 'but to-morrow morning——' she paused, and thought of those desperate issues of the night to which she was committed, and through which none might help her—'perhaps by to-morrow light will have come . . . and if you ever prayed for us, Doune—for father and me —you will pray for us to-night.'

But there was less of prayer than of cursing in Doune's heart as he loosed his sister's hand and strode away.

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CHAPTER VIII.

'I had happier died by thee,
Than lived on as Lady Leigh.'

Dusk faded into darkness before Madcap moved from where Doune had left her; then she stole to the library door, but a profound silence reigned within, and she went softly out to the courtyard to see if her father had kindled lights.

But the shutters were closed, and only the stars gave a clue to the figure that crouched close against the window, and to which Madcap drew closer, till she touched it, but got no answer save a shudder of fear, as if the touch of a policeman, not a friend, were on its arm.

'You are Hester Clarke,' said Madcap below her breath, and lifted a fold of the cloak that hid the woman's face; then said, 'Come with me,' in a voice there was no resisting, even if her hand had not drawn the intruder with her towards the stone steps that led to the nursery.

What memories thronged round Hester as she ascended them . . . yet, as one who walked in a dream, she followed the girl into the room where Dody had died on her knees, and she had been dragged away as the murderer of his mother.

A lamp burned dimly—by its light the two looked at

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each other; then Hester sank to her knees, and with trembling kissed the girl's hand.

'Why do you do that?' said Madcap; 'for you have done no wrong. You spoke this afternoon of your sin, your weakness; but to me it seems that you have behaved nobly.'

Lower the woman's head sank till her face was hidden, and only a keen ear could have caught the words, 'You don't know . . . and I can't find words to tell you.'

'Tell me,' whispered Madcap, with a chill foreboding that pierced even her absorption in what lay before her, yet with her eyes fixed on the windows of the opposite wing.

I don't know how the words struggled out, how the confession was made . . . but the worst was over, when Madcap knelt, and lifted the dark head to her breast, and heard the rest through half-broken sobs, as Hester leaned against her.

'It was just so that *she* put her arms round me . . . once in the copse when she only knew me as a stranger, and in trouble, and again when she knew nothing but ill of me . . . it was the very day she died, and my heart was full of envy and bitterness when we met . . . I meant to steal her child when she was safely over her trouble; and in this very room I told your father that he should suffer for his sins through *her*. And he thought that I meant to kill her; and he never knew how, half an hour later, she and I came face to face, and I don't know which of us spoke first . . . but she kissed me, and I swore to myself then, that no matter what came to me, I would never harm her, nor anyone that she loved. Perhaps some foreboding touched her, though she seemed so happy, for she said when we parted, "I am glad that I have understood you—at last;" and once she looked

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back, and there was something so solemn and sweet in her eyes, that after she had gone I cried, with a presentiment that I should never see her again.'

Hester paused, and shivered through and through.

'But I saw her once more . . . I could not let well alone, and I stole here late at night to see Dody . . . he was my one joy on earth, my idol, and I knew him to be ill, though Josephine hid it from your mother; and though it tore my heart in two, I resolved that night to go away, and not even let my shadow come between your father and that lovely, sweet soul. . .

'Perhaps you can't understand it,' she went on, lifting her head, 'that a woman should love a young child so . . . but perhaps it is *because* he is so young, because his ways are so dear, and that every passionate instinct of protection is roused by him in one's breast, that one loves him so. . . Do you think a mother bears with a grown-up child's ingratitude because she loves him as he is? No! but because she remembers him as he was, and his words and looks come back to her . . . and Dody was the living image of what my own child might have been. . .'

She drew a little away from Madcap as she spoke, but the girl did not shrink; it seemed to her that nothing new could come to her now . . . since yesterday she had touched every note of the whole gamut of human joy and sorrow.

'I had barely time to kiss him,' resumed Hester, forcing herself to the end of her narration, 'when steps approached from outside, and I had just time to hide myself before Lord Lovel came in. He approached Dody's bed, but made no search for me, and went through to the day nursery, being met there by Josephine. Here was my opportunity; I kissed my dear love and stole away, but a light in his mother's room seemed to

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beckon me, and I crossed the courtyard meaning only to look up, and bespeak her a blessing before I went.

'My foot struck against something hard as I stood outside the library window; I put out my hand, and found it was a ladder, and some mad impulse made me climb it. You know the rest . . . would to God he had killed me, not her, that night!'

'No,' said Madcap, in a low voice, 'for if he had killed *you*, it would have been murder—he would have done it with intention; but with my mother——' she checked herself suddenly, then said:

'I have work to do to-night, and you must help me. I meant to go through with it alone, but as you saved him once, so you shall help to save him again; only differently, for then you will know that in heart and spirit he is—innocent.'

Both were standing now, and Madcap saw how a kind of incredulous fear spread over Hester's face; then the woman stooped, and humbly kissed her hand.

'Set me what work you will,' she said; 'the harder the better.'

'Listen,' said Madcap. 'It is now ten o'clock, and I will tell the servants (there are only three; the others are in town) to shut up the house and go to bed. No one will come here, and I will bring you food, and then—then——'

The girl did not finish her sentence as she ran out, and Hester stood immovable for awhile, then crossed the room to where Dody's little bed had once stood, and with a sob kneeled down beside the empty space, and covered her face with her hands.

Was her sin never to be blotted out? was it to go on fulfilling itself in endless cycles of suffering that involved the innocent more cruelly than the guilty?

She was kneeling there still when Madcap returned,

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and the sound of her own weeping made inaudible those light steps that presently stopped beside her.

'Come and eat,' said the girl, laying a gentle hand on the still beautiful head, now abased to the very dust.

Hester rose at once, and went to the table, set out with bread and meat and wine.

When she had forced herself to eat and drink, she said to Madcap, who was watching the opposite wing:

'I am ready.'

Madcap put out her hand, and without a word led her down the stone steps into the courtyard.

'We must be quick,' she said, 'for he may go upstairs at any moment;' and hand in hand the two ran to a tool-house that was dark as pitch, but from which Madcap presently issued, staggering under the weight she bore.

It was the ladder that first Hester had climbed, then Digges, lastly Mr. Eyre; and it felt like lead to Hester as she lifted one end up, and with an instinctive knowledge of Madcap's purpose, led the way.

When it was firmly placed—but so quietly that none within could have heard a sound, the girl drew the woman aside, and said: 'I am asking you something hard—but you said the harder the better; and it is for *his* sake; and if you should feel the cold out here, you will know there is some one colder still within. . .'

'What shall I do?' said Hester, in a whisper.

'You will watch my mother's window — the room which is still my father's bed-chamber. The moment you see a light within, you will climb the ladder and watch. No matter what happens, you must not cry out, or speak. You must not interfere . . . if he should kill me, you will steal away as you did before, and keep his secret; but by the morning' (she touched Hester's hand) 'I think that to both of us light will have come.'

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CHAPTER IX.

'Said I not that all God sends is good? Only generally it is not until the morning that we see why He denied us something in the evening.'

Gesta Romanorum.

How do inspirations, desperate resolves, enter a human soul? Are they kindled by sheer agony, longing, or prayer? But to Madcap a divine message seemed to have come, when at midnight she went with trembling limbs to the room which was to be the scene of her desperate experiment.

In the study below, Mr. Eyre worked swiftly and monotonously through the business that most concerned him and his, until all was in order, and his man of business, or his executor—nay, his daughter even—could find no difficulty in fulfilling his last wishes and administering his estate.

His wife's love-letters to him were duly secured in his breast; the old Army-Guide lay open on the table, with the name 'Methuen' scored out, and 'Lovel' marked with red ink in its place; but among the sealed letters lay one with neither seal nor enclosure, though it was addressed to 'Miss Eyre.'

The confusion of his mind had by now subsided, leaving only a fixed belief in Hester's guilt, in Frank's

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confirmed madness, and Madcap's profound deceit; while of Doune he scarcely thought at all.

But with pen in hand, ready to write down scathing words of reproach (for he meant to give himself up to justice on the morrow, and force his accusers to appear before him), he suddenly fell into a sound sleep or stupor, his eyes fixed on the unsullied page, his hand rigid, his whole body immovable, as if struck to stone by a wizard's wand.

For half an hour he sat thus. Then, still in that cataleptic trance, laid down the pen, stretched his hand to the light, which he lifted; then with even steps crossed the room to the private stair communicating with his bedroom.

Two women, who had grown cold with watching, even in the midst of summer heat, saw the zigzag light of the candle showing on the corkscrew staircase, heard the steps ascend, then saw Mr. Eyre enter, the light wavering over his fixed face and wide-opened eyes—O heavens! *in his sleep?* Almost aloud Madcap prayed it, as at sight of the white figure seated in his wife's chair he stopped short, then advanced with violence towards her, feeling in his breast as for a weapon; then, turning as by remembered instinct to the cabinet near, opened a drawer, in imagination snatched a knife, and stabbed at her, once, twice, exclaiming 'Die! *die!*' in a voice of fury. Then, making as though he replaced the weapon, turned, and went down the staircase, holding the light steadily, and with no sign of either hurry or discomposure on his features.

She followed him down, love's work being not completed yet, and saw him seat himself at the table; but when, trembling, she stole nearer, she saw by his wide-open fixed eyes that he was still asleep, though his

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folded arms rested on the edges of a large book that he had opened and set before him.

Then Madcap kneeled down beside him, knowing that her prayer had been granted, and that love's miracle had saved him . . . then sight and sense failed her, and she fell forward with her bright hair veiling her face, as her head sank on his knee.

* * * * *

Hester Clarke had entered with amazement and terror into Madcap's scheme that night, for she went blindfold, and without the clue upon which the girl's hand had so firmly closed.

She had climbed the ladder with fear, and nearly lost her balance on it, when, through the half-open window, she saw the room with everything in it arranged exactly as when she had last seen it, seventeen years ago—the very chair, the very figure seated in it, completed the picture that was graven on her heart.

The jewel-cases lay open on the table, and a lace handkerchief on the smaller one beside Madcap, just as Mrs. Eyre had tossed it down on the diamonds that Josephine's covetous eyes had detected an hour later, and stolen with Digges's knowledge, to her own undoing and his . . . nothing was needed to complete Hester's illusion that she was dreaming, save Mr. Eyre's appearance on the scene; and, icy cold with fear and apprehension, she awaited it.

The night wore on.

She put one arm within the stone casement to steady herself the better; but she never once tried to attract the attention of the quiet figure that, seated with its back to her, seemed not to have moved a muscle since she approached.

But all the past fulfilled itself, even to the minutest

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detail, when Mr. Eyre's light showed on the stair, and in pantomime he repeated each gesture, each blow, she had seen him use when he killed his wife. But to her older eyes (as to Madcap's young ones) a clearer light had come; and as Mr. Eyre disappeared, and the girl followed him, it was borne in upon her how, not by her sin alone, but by her testimony against him, she had committed an irreparable wrong.

All was explained now: his firm belief in her guilt; his pursuit of her, and strenuous endeavours to get her hanged; his search for Lord Lovel; and his hatred for the friend who could hurl a false accusation (as Mr. Eyre believed) against him, then run away, as if too cowardly to even try and substantiate the lie; the inward sense of innocence sustaining him, so that suspicion passed him by unscathed, and he could exclaim, 'This hand is innocent!' . . . ay! as in sooth it was, if it committed automatically a deed from which the will, consent, and controlling power of the mind were absent.

A great wave of love, of pity, swept over Hester's soul as she bowed her head on the casement, and thought of how he must have suffered, of how infinitely more he must suffer yet, when the truth should reach him from his daughter's lips. Perhaps he was learning it below even now; but her heart sank lower and lower, as the minutes passed, and no sign from Madcap came to release her from her post.

Towards dawn a slight stir reached her ear, and the next moment she heard steps rising from the study, and saw the flicker of a light on the wall. She leaned forward with a half-sob of relief, only to shrink back as she saw Mr. Eyre enter, pale as a corpse indeed, but *awake!*

'How could she ever have mistaken him?' she

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wondered, as, weak and numbed, she cowered down, invisible from within the lamp-lit room, though without, in the clear, strengthening dawn, she might be distinctly seen, and was every moment in danger of discovery.

He set the light down, and for the last time approached the cabinet about which for seventeen years his brain had held some secret knowledge that defied him.

Hester heard him open a drawer, and then followed a long and profound silence, in which, for the last time, the one half of his brain struggled with the other; and as he had wrung the truth from Lord Lovel and Hester that day, so now he thought he forced the lock of that sealed chamber which had defied him, and *saw*.

All was apparently clear to him now—the seated figure by the window in Synge Lane that he had *desired* to kill was Hester; the figure he had actually killed in a fit of madness of which he had no memory was his wife, and he had put the knife back in the cabinet as the woman described . . . he remembered now, that the cry for help that night had roused him from a dream of appalling vividness, in which he was in the act of stabbing Hester to the heart, and even woke with a passionate feeling of exultation that he was rid of her, and that his wife's happiness was now secure.

When Parrhasius struggled to depict the supremest agony of which a human being is capable, he *covered* the face of the man he delineated, and only by the attitude of the limbs and hands revealed the intention of his work. Some such awful expression stole slowly over Mr. Eyre's averted head and body, as Hester for a few frozen seconds watched him; then, without a sound, she shrank out of sight and crept down the ladder, whence, regaining Madcap's empty room, she sat down by the window to watch.

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CHAPTER X.

'It is conscience that preserves the right of the will.'

MADCAP came out of that long slumber feeling like a soldier who has lain down to sleep at the post of duty; for the room was empty, the fresh morning wind blew in through the open window, and the village clock was striking the hour of nine.

Signs of Mr. Eyre's late presence were visible in the cloak he had wrapped about her, and the pillow he had placed beneath her head; and when a hasty glance round assured her that he had left no letter, she persuaded herself that his absence was but momentary, and going to the foot of the private staircase, she listened for signs of him above. A quick step in the room made her turn, only to start back as at a frightful apparition, for all dishevelled, his hair wet with dew, his gaze wild, and his mien that of a madman, her brother stood before her.

'O God!' he cried, before she could speak, 'that he can say "*This hand* did the deed," and yet it does not wither—his tongue is not struck dumb by fire from the heaven to which he sent her! Mother—poor murdered mother!—perhaps you knew it, and forgave him—*him*, inhuman wretch!—whom you loved better than your children. Hearken!' (he seized Madcap's hand in a grip

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of steel, pouring out his words with such rapidity that it was impossible to check him); 'all night I have wandered in the woods with a hell in my breast, with the hatred of Cain for Abel burning in me against our father. In vain I have sought excuses, have tried to persuade myself the murder was no murder, but an accident, or some hideous mischance; I forced myself to recall his care of me, his tenderness for you; I reviewed the upright life he has led ever since I was old enough to judge between right and wrong, and by morning I had subdued that unnatural hatred, and longed only to be face to face with him, to hear any explanation—any palliation of the crime that might render him less abhorrent to me; and it was with even a faint feeling of hope that I sought him here.'

Madcap strove to speak—to interpose, but Doune's vehement words swept hers aside as straws in a torrent, and she could only wait till, by his violence, he had exhausted himself.

'I found him; God knows what thoughts swelled my heart as I approached him—of our mother, of Dody, of you, of her—for she loves me, Madcap . . . I have caught a timid look now and then . . . and her voice—but I have heard it for the last time——'

'No, no!' cried Madcap, as for the first time he paused, and an expression of despairing tenderness crossed his convulsed features; 'she loves you, and our father is innocent——'

'Innocent!' cried Doune, turning upon her with a frenzied gesture of intolerant contempt. 'He owned the deed—he avowed it without ruth or shame; he offered not one word in condonation, and seemed to forget it was my *mother* to whose murder he so indifferently confessed. Even to my curses——'

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'You have cursed him!' cried Madcap, sinking down in terror. 'Oh, you know not what you have done! Father, poor father!' and she moved as though to go in search of him.

'Say rather "*Poor mother!*"' said Doune, in a voice that brought tears to Madcap's eyes, though his own still retained the hard, strained look that so alarmed her. 'Murdered,' he went on rapidly, and gazing before him as at some frightful sight—'her life-blood ebbing away under the arm that clasped Dody and me when we kissed her last; and Frank Lovel's life ruined, and mine too, and *hers* . . . and beyond all these, Hester Clarke and Janet Stork, more victims to his sins; and this is the man we have loved, we have honoured——'

'And whom we may love and honour still,' cried Madcap, swift as light; 'for he committed the murder *in his sleep!*'

For a moment Doune's face worked strangely, and she thought he trembled on the verge of dreadful laughter; but to her joy a more rational expression overspread his features, as he said:

'Is it with such wild hopes as these you buoy yourself up, Madcap? So that's why you are so bright, although so pale; and a moment ago I thought you heartless, hateful even, to look so. I think I have been mad;' he passed his hand over his eyes, out of which the wild, strained expression was gradually disappearing; 'but a man's brain might turn for less, and now there's the bitter, black reality to be faced, and lived through to our lives' end. But at least we have one another.'

Involuntarily he held out his arms, and for a moment the brother and sister clung to each other desperately, and not as in their happy, childish days.

Then Doune would have put her aside, but she would

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not let him go; she forced him to hear her, though as her story progressed she had less trouble on that point, till its end saw him standing breathless and white before her, but with the dawn of something like hope overspreading his features.

Then she reminded him of how he had walked constantly in his sleep during those dangerous days of his youth, when brain had overmastered body, and he had slipped towards those shadowy boundaries that divide reason from madness; again she brought to his mind the story of Brandon Eyre, and how, though his guilt was clearly proved, he swore his innocency, and died by his own hand rather than live dishonoured; his grandmother, Lady Sara, afterwards swearing that she could explain it all, though her explanation was never given.

All this Madcap urged on her brother with a swiftness that exceeded even his own vehemence of a few minutes before, and stopped only to leave him confounded at the weight of evidence she brought to establish her marvellous assertion that, in truth, their father was, in all save deed, innocent.

A knock at the door disturbed them before he could speak, and Saunders entered, bearing a letter that at the first glance Madcap saw to be from her father.

The old servant's face was sad as he handed it, and looked from the one face to the other. No one knew better than he that trouble had come to the Red Hall, though he little guessed its extent.

Madcap tore open the letter, and, in Mr. Eyre's firm handwriting, read the following:

'Madcap—child—beloved daughter—by the time you receive this I shall have delivered myself up to justice for

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the murder of your mother. In heart and hand I am guilty, and will suffer for it in due course, *She* has forgiven me—perhaps in time *you*, who have been the joy of my life, the light of my eyes, my good and (except in one instance) most faithful daughter—you who, in the two darkest hours of my life, have come to me, and perchance love me still, in time may learn to forgive your most unhappy, guilty father,

'EYRE.'

She kissed the letter before she gave it to Doune. She saw how he had scored out 'Miss Eyre' and written 'Madcap' on the envelope instead, and by that mute token knew how he had forgiven her the one deception toward him of her life.

But how, without her help to guide him, had he become convinced of his guilt? had Hester blundered, or, with only vague instructions to guide her, meddled fatally in the business of the night? Forgetful of Doune even, she ran up the secret stair, and into the empty room, now flooded with morning light; then she looked out and saw the ladder against the wall, then opposite to where from the nursery a pale face seemed to beckon her—the face of Hester, not Nan.

Nan, indeed, had knocked outside her young mistress's door for some time without getting any answer, and had then retired to breakfast, she being as ignorant as the other women of what had been going on in the house that night.

Mr. Eyre had always been a master whose habits must be neither questioned nor interfered with; his daughter's, too, were so far like his own, that if she happened to take a walk at daybreak, no one dreamed of supposing her to be drowned, or fished for her in the

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surrounding ponds and puddles. So that when Madcap crossed the courtyard, it would have seemed the most natural thing in the world (had there been any onlookers) that she should have risen early, and gone over to put flowers in her father's study, already set straight against his unexpected return, though her dress was the tumbled one she had worn throughout that dreadful but most blessed night.

Hester sprang up as the girl entered, and the two pale faces turned to one another.

'You know *now*?' said Madcap, out of breath, and with the hurry of imminent need compelling her to abrupt speech; 'and so you will come with me, and we will bear witness together for *him*. . . .'

Her voice ceased in a sob as she began to pull off her gown; then vanished, only to reappear fresh bathed, and dressed in something white as snow, and with an eager look of hope on her face that contrasted forcibly with the pallor and pain stamped on Hester's features.

Then, hand-in-hand, the women went down the steps together, the one lightly, the other heavily, and as if the three-mile walk to Marmiton were beyond her strength.

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CHAPTER XI.

'Since thunder-stricken . . .
Fixed in the spectral strain and throe
Wherewith it struggled from the blow . . .'

MEANWHILE an extraordinary scene was being enacted at Marmiton Gaol. At eight o'clock Mr. Eyre had walked in and given himself in custody for the murder of his wife; and before the dreadful confession had properly reached the brain of the Governor, who imagined Mr. Eyre to have suddenly gone mad, named Hester Clarke as witness to the deed, and Lord Lovel as being well acquainted with the fact.

The man was at first stupefied; but Mr. Eyre persisting in his story, and showing no other signs of madness, in less than an hour his brother magistrates were summoned, and a scene of the utmost confusion among them prevailed.

He alone was calm, and asked that no one might be admitted to his cell, *especially his daughter*—and as he named her, the first sign of emotion he had yet shown crossed his features.

To Lord Lovel, who was present, and who vainly implored him to withdraw his self-accusation, he said he was resolved on doing his duty, and hoped Frank would do his, and make Hester Clarke do hers; for

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that though he had disbelieved their story yesterday, in the night he had become convinced of its truth.

He added that Lord Lovel's knowledge of it had exiled him, and no doubt was the reason of his acquiescence in the case of mistaken identity, by which Major Methuen had been buried under his name, and many living persons persuaded that Lord Lovel, not the other, had died.

Colonel Busby had for once absolutely collapsed under the shock of a double surprise; for though he had all along been convinced that Mr. Eyre was the real murderer, he had never expected him to confess it. He had been equally convinced that Mr. Eyre was at the bottom of Frank Lovel's death, until the arrival of the former with his friend's body, and certain well-authenticated facts proved the young man to have died in battle, and even the supposition that a mistake of identity had been made was negatived by the recognition that, from Job downwards, all gave him as he lay in humble state at the Towers.

Yet the man lived—was here to stand forth for the man whom he knew to be a murderer; the man who had stolen his sweetheart, filched his good name, banished him from home and country, yet accepted all these favours without a sign of gratitude in the past, or of recognition to-day.

More than one might have pressed forward to take the hand of the soldierly, bronzed man, who at forty-three was handsomer far than at twenty-five—the last date of his public appearance by Mr. Eyre's side—but that, as usual, the latter fixed all eyes, occupied all but transient thoughts, to the exclusion of every other soul present. The greater part of them thought him mad, for Digges's suicide had practically proved him the murderer, while

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his wife's possession of the diamonds attested to the reason for the deed.

He was reminded of this, but remarking carelessly:

'She must have stolen them after the discovery of the deed; and he, poor wretch, knew it,' turned as if to seek his cell, when he found himself detained by the clasp of two loving arms, and felt the print of a warm kiss upon his hand.

He looked down, and saw his daughter; beyond her, Hester Clarke, with a curious mixture of shame and gladness on her weary face.

'There's your other witness,' he said, pointing to her, and with no signs of ruth for the wrongs he had worked her visible in his glance, any more than of gratitude for the splendid part she had acted towards him.

'What do you do here, child?' he said abruptly to Madcap; 'I told them not to admit you; but I suppose a prisoner's word has no weight. And I can better bear to know myself what I am, than to read such knowledge in your eyes.'

The last words were inaudible to all save the girl, who but held that beloved hand the closer, and kissed it yet again as, struggling to speak, she looked up.

Frank never forgot the father and daughter as they looked then. . . . Sure, such a sight might have drawn

'*Iron tears down Pluto's cheek*'—

the girl's transfigured face, with its upward look of glad tidings, as if, indeed, it bore a heavenly message; Mr. Eyre's stern, rugged, with down-bent gaze, that softened suddenly to profoundest tenderness as with his left hand he pushed her bright hair back, but strove to draw his right from her breast.

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'It is stained with blood—your mother's blood,' he said.

But she cried out, as with the voice of an angel:

'You are innocent. Oh, father! you are innocent!'

'Would to God that I were!' he said, with the first sign of human feeling about the deed that he had yet shown.

'It is true,' said Hester, in a low, distinct voice; 'in heart, soul, and intention, you are guiltless—in act alone you are guilty, *for the murder was committed in your sleep.*'

Exclamations of incredulity broke from nearly all present, Colonel Busby's being strongly flavoured with contempt; but Mr. Eyre stood rigid, his eyes fixed on Hester as if he would search her very soul—and in it he found the truth.

The mists rolled away. Aided by some curious knowledge from within, her words made all clear to him, and in one flash of light, one moment of time, was thrown open to him that chamber of his brain which for eighteen years had been closed against him. The discovery that he had made in the night, and which had determined him to give himself up to justice, had been but a partial one, and his supposition that he had committed the deed in a moment of madness, and forgotten it, had gone widely far of the truth.

Not guilty! not guilty in *will* of taking that sweet life . . . a look of joy overspread his features.

'Oh, wife! . . . wife! . . .' he murmured inaudibly, and looking straight before him, as if he saw only a lovesome shape that smiled on, and beckoned him to come to her. . . . He passed his hand across his brows, and was his usual self, as he said, 'Yet I am guilty, for the spirit of murder dwelt in me; and even if my hand uncon-

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sciously worked the crime, it did but obey the impulse that, in waking moments, had filled my mind—the impulse' (to Hester Clarke) 'to murder you. *I* was the man seen by the tramp in Synge Lane with a weapon in my hand, which I had taken there with a deliberate intention. So that, in heart and hand alike, I am guilty, and will suffer.' He turned once more to his daughter, and said, 'So you do not shrink from me—*she* did not, though I killed her. And now I must leave you.'

'It is a clear case of committal,' said Colonel Busby, with uneasy dignity; 'and as to this ridiculous story about the sleep-walking, there will be time enough to discuss that when the trial comes on.'

'There is time now,' said Madcap, in a voice that commanded attention; and in brief, vigorous words she detailed the events of the previous day and night, the interview in the wood with Lord Lovel, the subsequent one with Hester in Synge Lane, that still, and in spite of circumstantial evidence, left Mr. Eyre convinced how both witnesses falsely affirmed his guilt.

Admiration succeeded wonder as she related how, partly from an accidental expression used by Hester, and partly from her own observation of her brother's acts when in a state of somnambulism, the idea had come to her that Mr. Eyre had committed the deed in his sleep, and being ignorant of his act, thought he spoke truth when he denied it. Following this idea came one to personate her mother, hoping that her unexpected presence in his room might awaken in him some memory of the fatal night; and by blessed good fortune the stratagem proved successful, for towards morning, *walking in his sleep*, he came up the private stair, and seeing her sitting there, made as though he snatched a weapon, and

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saying 'Die! die!' stabbed violently at the air, then turned and went downstairs.

Madcap felt a thrill run through her father as she spoke —she knew his thought, how, if a real instead of an imaginary weapon had been in his hand, he might have slain *her* as he slew her mother.

Her lip trembled—her voice refused to continue the narration . . . a sudden sense of cruelty, of disrespect to *him* in this open dissection of his acts, his motives, this baring of their inmost home-life, smote her, and she turned from the eager faces around to hide her head on his breast.

Then Hester's voice took up the tale, and when she had ended by describing what had that morning been witnessed by herself alone, there was not a soul present, save Colonel Busby, who did not reckon Mr. Eyre in *heart* innocent.

'Yet at your own trial, woman,' said Colonel Busby, beginning to strut, 'you *knew* him to be guilty?'

'I did.'

'And you think a judge and jury will accept a story that has probably its origin in the fevered imagination of two weak women? And who is to know, pray, that the —the murderer'—he pointed to Mr. Eyre—'is not in collusion with you both?'

'Poor busybody!' said Mr. Eyre carelessly, 'too futile to be venomous;' and then he took his daughter's face between his hands, looked at her very earnestly, then kissed her once, and went out.

They heard his receding footsteps dwindle gradually into silence—a silence broken by the sharp clang of the cell-door as it shut upon the man who was at last alone with his heart and God.

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CHAPTER XII.

'O, see for he gangs, an' see for he stands,
The wearie heir o' Linne!
O, see for he stands on the cauld causeway,
And nae ane bids him come in!'

UTTER silence followed Mr. Eyre's departure; even Colonel Busby's uneasy authority could not be exercised upon a man who had himself committed his body to imprisonment, and the others could not discuss the father in presence of his daughter. But Madcap quickly relieved them of that awkwardness by retiring with Hester, having in a few brief words asked for, and obtained, permission to remain in the prison, and within call of her father, should he send for her.

She had not once looked at Lord Lovel since she entered, yet knew he was there; and her cheek went paler yet, as a step on the flagged passage followed hers, and on entering the room to which the Governor himself showed her, she looked round only to see Frank in the act of closing the door upon herself and him.

She neither glanced up nor drew breath as he approached; all the spirit, the vigour that had animated her since she had risen elastic from the awful blow of yesterday, now deserted her, and pale and drooping as a beaten-down lily she stood, as Frank came nearer and stood beside her.

'Can you forgive me?' he said, so deeply moved that

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he could scarcely speak; 'for it is all my fault, my doing. If I had only possessed enough strength of will to keep away from Lovel—or even if I had not returned a second time and gone to the wood, he might have lived and died ignorant of the truth.'

She half looked up then, and saw that he carried his right arm in a sling; but she scarcely noticed it, her mind was so engulfed in thoughts of the wrongs he had so patiently endured, not only at her father's hands, but her own.

Could she forgive him—this idol of her childhood; this more than hero of her youth; this man who had laid his inheritance down, for a lesser than he to take, and gone forth a homeless wanderer, that he might save his friend—the friend who met him with insult, ay, and blows, and whose daughter was so much his own child that she had not scrupled to fling many a bitter gibe and taunt at him?

In one lightning moment she saw all the beauty, the unselfishness of this life that had elected

'To suffer and be strong'

at the cost of happiness. Memory upon memory flashed its light upon him, in the midst of which he stood out apart and alone, something better, brighter, nobler than man or angel had ever shone in her eyes or dreams yet, and she *saw* him as he was.

She saw him acting the part of son, of his own free will giving up his days, submitting to the restraints of hourly avoidance of Mr. Eyre, to soothe the dying pillow of a poor bedridden woman who first loved and clung to him for his likeness to her dead son, then loved him for himself, but by her very affection imposed on him an almost intolerable existence . . . and this was the man who had asked the girl only to *trust* him; and had she

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indeed given so poor a thing as love without faith, to such an one as might well have been

'Aslauga's pure and faithful knight'? . . .

She covered her face with both hands; and he, thinking that only an unwilling sense of benefits conferred checked the anger she longed to express (for had she not chosen between them, and chosen her father?), cried out:

'Blame me, Madcap—curse me even, if you will; for whatever I may have done for duty, I have more than undone for love.'

'Oh, sweet fault!' she thought, as lower she bent her head, and said very low:

'You are *sorry* that you came back?'

Her voice startled him with its gentleness . . . once more he lived again that moment of perfect happiness in the wood . . . that moment which God Himself could not take away from him, for it had been his own.

'No, I am not sorry,' he said, and at the passion in his voice Madcap trembled. 'Come what may—cling to your father, and hate me as you will—you have loved me, Madcap, and you have kissed me.'

He could not see the red that mounted to her very brow—he thought her attitude one of aversion to him; and this shrinking in one who had but lately shown such splendid courage astonished him, and brought her nearer to that elder Madcap, who had lacked the strength of will and power of intellect possessed by her daughter.

'I am not sorry,' he repeated more calmly; 'it is you who are sorry—you who will never cease to reproach me for robbing you of your father.'

'How have you done that?' she said, startled; 'they cannot punish him for what he is really guiltless of; and to-morrow—to-day, even—he will come home with me to the Red Hall.'

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But Frank stood silent; he knew Mr. Eyre even better than his daughter did, and he foresaw but one ending to the last act of the tragedy that had already destroyed four lives.

But even the thought of her father could not put by her answer to his question, 'Could she forgive him?' . . . perhaps at last her silence answered him, as slowly, and with lips that quivered like those of a child who comes to beg forgiveness, she approached him, and, taking his hand, pressed those trembling lips upon it, then, white and wan, looked up in his face.

Yet never in her most blooming hour had she looked to Frank as now, with those eyes of love, so lovely, so sweet, so true, showing like glimpses of heaven to the man who had summoned such a glance from her heart thither.

For all that he had suffered, all that he had done, he was repaid now. All was washed out, all was forgotten, as they stood gazing at each other; then,

'Madcap!' he said, in a whisper that was yet a sob of joy; but something in her look kept him back, and he only lifted her hands to his breast, and kissed them there.

'You have forgiven me,' she said; 'and now we will only think of father—and Doune. He is quieter now, but some one should be with him. Will you go to him, and tell him that I shall stay here all day, and perhaps all night, within call of father?'

'I will go,' he said, 'and I will come back to you.'

At the door he paused; her eyes were following him, her lips moved as though they uttered words of tenderness that welled up from the heart; he stretched his arms to her, would have returned, but she waved him back; then, as the door closed on him, took shame to herself that in this hour, when alone her father drank his bitter cup, she could find one drop of sweetness in her own.

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CHAPTER XIII.

'A being of higher faculties requires more to make him happy than one of an inferior type.'

TEN o'clock found Doune in his father's library, pacing it with restless steps, and but little less disordered than he had appeared to Madcap after his conversation with Mr. Eyre.

In manner he was calmer, but his mind had passed into a more dangerous state, and was now receiving impressions that it would be well-nigh impossible to efface.

Alone he had weighed every word of Madcap's story, and implicitly believed it; nor had the idea crossed his mind that Mr. Eyre had deliberately simulated the part of a sleep-walker, in order still longer to conceal his crime. He accepted the literal truth, and knew his mother to have been less murdered than the victim of a fatal accident.

But the irresponsibility of the act at once appalled and unnerved him; more than once he looked down at his own hand in doubt and terror, feeling an impulse to strike it off before it, too, should have worked some unnatural deed.

A perception of a dual existence, inherited from his

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father, and in which he moved and even acted without volition, shuddered through his mind, and made his flesh recoil as against itself.

A rooted conviction seized him that his father's fate must inevitably be his own, that his future was inextricably entangled in the guilt of Mr. Eyre's past; their very resemblance to each other in appearance, brain, pursuits, and habits, and of which he had formerly been so proud, now became hateful to him, and the mere chance reflection of himself in a mirror gave him a physical sensation of self-loathing.

He had been too deeply struck by the blow Mr. Eyre's confession had given him to rally for more than a moment under the comparative relief of Madcap's revelation.

The fact remained that his mother (that mother who had been the idol of his early childhood, and, when lost, so passionately mourned for and remembered, that she was yet the central living figure in all the boy's thoughts and life) had been murdered, and by his father's hand.

That vivid image could never be effaced; and pity, love, hopeless longing to call back the life that in its joy had made others precious, swelled his heart to bursting, yet could not bring one tear of relief to eyes stern as his father's own, but glazed, as if beyond all outer thought. One sight alone had power to compel and fix his attention.

Was it to such an end that Mr. Eyre's love had pointed, when he took that lovely young life in his hand, and, all ductile as it was, fashioned it to his will?

Could he have foreseen that end, would he not have passed it by, to wither perchance from lack of his love, but escaping the violence of a passion which uprooted, when most it should have cherished it?

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All the circumstances of her death, as seen from a child's standpoint, crowded thickly on his mind, and brought a new stab, a fresh pang, with each.

Even his sister was involved in it, for the knife that pierced the mother must barely have escaped the unborn babe; and, but for a miracle, the two Madcaps must have been slain by one hand.

And should he, with that fatal inheritance of his father's person and brain, with even his peculiar idiosyncrasy stamped upon him, take a young, innocent soul to himself, and ask it to share a lifelong companionship with one who at any moment might, in irresponsible mistake of his object, wreak the whole force of his hatred, instead of his love, upon her?

Should he bring home this gentle creature (this sunbeam that had not so much played on his eyes, as touched his heart when they first met), to love, make happy, and some day stab to the heart? or should he bring up children only to see the curse fulfilled that he had fortuitously escaped, to see the taint appear that Lady Sara had so deeply rooted in the family some hundred years ago, and that had taken the mark of dishonour in Brandon Eyre?

Never! on this point duty was clear, and heart and will ratified it. If across the gulf that rolled between them he met Nanciebel's suddenly grown tender look, and seemed to see the timid, eager hands outstretched to him, he shut his eyes to their beckoning, and thanked God that hitherto he had tasted so little of love's sweets, that he would be the better able now to endure his unbroken fast of them.

Doubt as to his course had never for a moment occupied his mind; but he had waited till the confusion of it subsided, before he sat down to write that letter to

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Nanciebel which should end, ere they had well begun, any passages of love between them.

He possessed all his father's decision in thought and act (though fortunately he lacked that inflexibility of will which had more than once blinded Mr. Eyre to consequences, and brought upon him signal disaster), and did not hesitate when presently he took pen in hand to write the first love-letter of his life.

No sense of compassion, of identification with his father's situation, distracted his thoughts from *her* at that moment. There is a strength, a vitality in the selfishness of the young, that makes no excuse as it sweeps all before, and in the writing of that letter he forgot all on earth save himself and her.

No matter what he said . . . . are not such letters scored as in marble on many a young girl's heart—ay, and on many a man's also—and never quite obliterated save by death? There is not much art in such productions, they are seldom read over by the owner of the hand that sets them down, seldomer still does a tear blot their irregular lines, and the hand that folds and addresses them is unusually steady.

* * * * * *

That letter was placed in Nanciebel's hand late on the evening of the same day.

Her packing over, her every arrangement made to start for Lovel early on the following day, she was sitting alone, with shy thoughts that hovered around Doune, yet refused to gaze full-front at the happiness that she knew awaited her.

Love had grown apace with her since that first shock of dread at the thought of leaving him had opened her eyes . . . nay, it had grown even since yesterday, when he had departed for Lovel, without any formal farewell

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to her, being so sure of seeing her again so soon . . . . but was he so impatient already, that he must *write* the words down that had been so much sweeter in the uttering and the hearing?

For a little while she sat with the letter in her hand, less as a child who holds some sweet morsel that it longs to taste, yet fears to have its delight too quickly over, than as one who looks beyond it, and sees something so infinitely better as to make comparatively valueless what it holds in its grasp.

Yet she kissed the seal before, at last, she broke it, perhaps with some flitting thought that eagerly expectant lovers were not usually so much masters of themselves as to remember sealing-wax; and then, with a long sigh of throbbing joy, the girl kneeled down by the window in the fast-waning light, and read her love-letter.

It was short—she needed not to turn the page; and her poor fingers stiffened over it as she read, so that five minutes later she found herself still staring at a blank page dimly outlined on the darkness, though memory painted in letters of fire the words written upon it.

The words that she had a hundred times checked upon his lips would never now be spoken. '*An obstacle had risen between them that neither time nor Heaven could remove.*' He hinted no more of vain love for her in the future, than he spoke of hopeful love in the past, nor did he imply that he had possession of her heart; yet soul spoke to soul through the stern lines, pitiless as fate, that cut their lives asunder.

She wronged him by no thought of a frivolous pretext, for she had not made him her chief study during the past months without learning his character better perhaps than he knew it himself; and no question of the im-

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mutability of his decree crossed her mind as, on the very threshold of her greatest happiness, she found herself rudely thrust back, and set outside it.

So we must leave her. . . . so through the long hours of the night must she wrestle with such agony as only the very young and the very strong have power to endure . . . and in the whole wide world she was homeless, and alone.

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CHAPTER XIV.

'Open the gates,
And let him come in;
He is my brother Huntley,
He'll do him nae harm.'

ALL that day, none might disturb Mr. Eyre, none dare seek to cross the threshold across which he sat, resolute to shut out by force any who should approach him; but towards evening those who hearkened heard a slight stir within, and it was Madcap's hand that dared to turn the key and enter.

He was sitting on the pallet that had been successively occupied by Janet Stork as prisoner for the murder of his child, and by Hester Clarke when on trial for the murder of his wife.

There was death in the face he turned on his daughter, and a burning fever scorched the arm that she twined about his neck as she kneeled beside him, and leant her head against his shoulder.

But he unlocked it, and folded both little hands beneath her chin, looking earnestly at her; then said:

'So have I seen you a thousand times asleep—the little golden head drooped forward, and

'"Thy tiny hands on thy wee breast"—

so perhaps has *she;* and when we meet, my one fault in

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her eyes, that I did not love her children, will be gone. Where's Doune?' he added abruptly; 'the boy took it badly—he should have been the girl, and you the man, for you are made of sterner stuff than he.'

'He is calmer now,' said Madcap, in a low voice, 'for he knows the *truth*.'

'He won't forgive me, for he loved his mother best,' said Mr. Eyre; 'and you'—he still held her from him, and looked at her keenly—'is there no one whom you too love *best?*'

A faint colour overspread her pale face, but her eyes did not falter as she said:

'You were first with my mother, you are first with her child. When you came to the wood, I had just made my choice between Frank Lovel and you; and I had chosen you.'

'You would have done the same if you had known then, what you know now, of his conduct and mine?'

'Yes.'

'Yet you deceived me, child. Wretch as I am, I can yet feel the sting of that.'

'Oh, *father!*' she said; then, quickly, for there was so little to tell, told him all. Perhaps her looks spoke more eloquently than words, and silence best of all, when her head sank forward and she ceased to speak.

'There's no wilful deceit in this,' said Mr. Eyre; 'and so you love him, child; and he has his reward. He lost one Madcap, only to find another; and I lose you, only to find *her*.'

'To find her?' said the girl, trembling. 'Oh no! You would not leave me here alone.'

'Your mother and I have been long apart, child,' he said; 'and I'm in haste to join her. If the law is as swift as it is usually slow, I shall not be impatient long.'

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'Father!' cried the girl, shrinking back in terror, 'you think they will try you—they will condemn you to death?'

'To be sure,' he said. 'But no matter; your courage has saved me in my own eyes, and my children's. For the world's opinion I care not one jot.'

Madcap neither moved nor spoke; every sense and faculty for the moment failed her, save that of seeing her father's body sharply outlined against a clear morning sky . . . and was he by such violent disruption of life as *this* to meet her mother?

'Only they must be quick about it,' he went on abruptly; 'for though you did not know it, I have been ill. Since I met Frank in town, there has been a fever in my blood, and my strength must have burnt out soon. Who's there?' he cried, as the key turned in the lock and the door opened.

It was Donne who entered, and God knows what memories of his father's care and tenderness, what thoughts of despair at the whole piteous tragedy, crowded on his mind as he drew near, and looked down upon the man who sat erect, neither clinging to nor supporting the daughter, whose arms were around him.

'Father,' said the young man, 'forgive me! I was mad when I saw you last, and your only brave, dutiful child is *there*.'

Mr. Eyre looked up, and realized that here was another soul with which to reckon, and one that he had practically left out of his calculations (for Madcap's mother and Madcap had absorbed all his thoughts)—a soul as stubborn and hard, if not as guilty, as his own.

Over Madcap's bowed head their glances met. There was death in the one, and immovable despair in the other; but as surely as the son knew that his father

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would shortly escape the consequences of his sin, so did the father that his son's life was not merely scorched, but blighted, by his sin.

'So you cannot endure what a woman can,' said Mr. Eyre; '*she*' (he touched Madcap's hair) 'is stronger.'

'She has no weaker life entwined with hers,' said Doune, a bitter ring in his hitherto lifeless voice; 'so that the hand that crushes one crushes both.'

'You mean Nancy?' said Mr. Eyre; 'well, she loves you, and you love her. If my crime keeps her from you, she is well lost.'

'Father,' said the young man, 'would you have married my mother, had you known that yours was to be the hand to end her life?'

'Ay, that would I!'

'And *I* would rather kill myself in cold blood!' exclaimed Doune, his eye kindling, and indignation breaking up the despairing calm of his features.

'Would that help her?' said Mr. Eyre; 'or, putting such a desperate remedy aside, think you a life lived apart from you, a slow death in which she looks and longs always for sign or sound of you—a death, in short, of *starvation*—is preferable to the one that you could give her? I have watched her,' he added abruptly: 'she is one of those who can love, and they are few. I never knew any other save——' he looked at Madcap, who had risen, and was standing by her brother's side.

'It is all over now, sir,' said Doune; 'I wrote to her this morning.'

For a brief moment father and son seemed to change places. It was the former who looked beaten down, conquered of fate; Doune who stood erect and defied it. But even as the shield of a young girl's arms went round

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him, Mr. Eyre said, 'Leave us now, child;' and in a few moments the two men were alone together.

What passed between them was never known; but Doune at length came forth, pale indeed, but with such a look in his haggard eyes as told of hope springing once more in the heart that he had believed to be crushed beyond the power of either God or man to make whole again.

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CHAPTER XV.

'Perchance and so thou purify thy soul,
And so thou lean on our fair father, Christ,
Hereafter in that world where all are pure,
We two may meet before High God, and thou
Wilt spring to me, and claim me thine.'

It was not Mr. Eyre's lot to be brought before any earthly tribunal more terrible than his own heart and his children's eyes, for in a very few days he had answered to a higher one, at which perhaps his only possible accuser, the one who had loved him best, would not appear.

He had got his death-blow in the moment that he discovered his guilt, and not even his daughter's devoted love could save him; the springs of life seeming to fail him suddenly, as though, with the death of his self-respect and honour, he too must cease to exist.

There had been no pretence even of his trial, and one day he was carried back to the Red Hall, where he lay till he died, with his children and Frank constantly beside him.

In those few short days the heart of the proud man at last found its Maker, and one of the truest signs of his repentance was when he sent for Hester, and asked her to forgive him.

As her burning tears fell on the hand she kissed,

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knowing how she had wronged and misunderstood him, her awful repentance for her sin outweighed his, and in the last look, the last words, for the first time these two erring souls understood one another.

His brain was perfectly clear, and he set his estate in order, and destroyed old letters; but gave into his daughter's hand a little packet that he desired her to bury with him. They were his sweetheart's love-letters —the only sweetheart of his life; and then he seemed to give himself no more concern about business, but went one afternoon to the bed whence he did not rise again.

That night he spoke of his little son Dody, who had died within a few days of his mother, and slept sound and sweet these seventeen years and more in her arms.

'I shall see him soon,' he said. 'I wonder if he will remember that I was unkind to him. Perhaps she has taught him to forgive me; and you always loved him, Frank, and he you. I've never asked *your* forgiveness, though I think *she* has; and I've left you another Madcap, my good, faithful child . . .'

He sank into a slumber even as he spoke, and did not wake till morning; then opened his eyes suddenly to see the three who stood beside him.

'*Light*,' he said; 'what is that verse of yours, child, I have so often heard you sing? So many things seem to have sunk into my soul lately, without my knowledge . . .'

Madcap drew in her breath hard, as she repeated the words; but as she came to

'*Those angel faces I have lost erewhile*,'

across Mr. Eyre's face flashed a look of light—ay, and

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more light . . . perchance enough to guide his soul to his lost Madcap, as, stretching out his arms to his children, he passed away to that last tribunal where, by the grace of God, he may have found forgiveness for his sins.

THE END.

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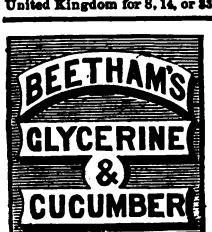

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